

**Companions
of the
Prophet**

Book Two

New Revised Edition

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"He called us to worship God alone... He commanded us to speak the truth, to honour our promises, to be kind to our relations, to be helpful to our neighbours, to cease all forbidden acts, to abstain from bloodshed, to avoid obscenities and false witness..."

(From the speech of Ja'far to the Negus of Abyssinia.)

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*"Struck by such severe hunger we even ate the leaves of the
thorny salam or acacia tree." (p. 113)*



1

Barakah

We do not know precisely how the young Abyssinian girl ended up for sale in Makkah. We do not know her 'roots', who her mother was, or her father or her ancestors. There were many like her, boys and girls, Arabs and non-Arabs, who were captured and brought to the slave market of the city to be sold.

A terrible fate awaited some who ended up in the hands of cruel masters or mistresses who exploited their labour to the full and treated them with the utmost harshness.

A few in that inhuman environment were rather more fortunate. They were taken into the homes of more gentle and caring people.

Barakah, the young Abyssinian girl, was one of the more fortunate ones. She was saved by the generous and kind 'Abdullāh, the son of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. She became the only servant in his household and when he was married, to the lady Āminah, she looked after her affairs as well.

Two weeks after the couple were married, according to Barakah, 'Abdullāh's father came to their house and instructed his son to go with a trading caravan that was leaving for Syria. Āminah was deeply distressed and cried:

"How strange! How strange! How can my husband go on a trading journey to Syria while I am yet a bride and the traces of henna are still on my hands!"

'Abdullāh's departure was heartbreaking. In her anguish, Āminah fainted. Soon after he left, Barakah said:

"When I saw Āminah unconscious, I shouted in distress and pain: 'O my lady!' Āminah opened her eyes and looked at me with tears streaming down her face. Suppressing a groan she said: 'Take me to bed, Barakah.'

"Āminah stayed bedridden for a long time. She spoke to no one. Neither did she look at anyone who visited her except 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, that noble and gentle old man.

"Two months after the departure of 'Abdullāh, Āminah called me at dawn one morning and, her face beaming with joy, she said to me:

'O Barakah! I have seen a strange dream.'

'Something good, my lady,' I said.

'I saw lights coming from my abdomen lighting up the mountains, the hills and the valleys around Makkah.'

'Do you feel pregnant, my lady?'

'Yes, Barakah,' she replied. 'But I do not feel any discomfort as other women feel.'

'You shall give birth to a blessed child who will bring goodness,' I said."

So long as 'Abdullāh was away, Āminah remained sad and melancholic. Barakah stayed at her side trying to comfort her and make her cheerful by talking to her and relating stories. Āminah however became even more distressed when 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib came and told her she had to leave her home and go to the mountains as other Makkans had done because of an impending attack on the city by the ruler of Yemen, someone called Abrahah.

Āminah told him that she was too grief-stricken and weak to leave for the mountains but insisted that Abrahah could never enter Makkah and destroy the Ka'bah because it was protected by the Lord. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib became very agitated but there was no sign of fear on Āminah's face. Her confidence that the Ka'bah would not be harmed was well-founded. Abrahah's army with an elephant in the vanguard was destroyed before it could enter Makkah.

Day and night, Barakah stayed beside Āminah. She said: "I slept at the foot of her bed and heard her groans at night as she called for her absent husband. Her moans would awaken me and I would try to comfort her and give her courage."

The first part of the caravan from Syria returned and was joyously welcomed by the trading families of Makkah. Barakah went secretly to the house of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib to find out about 'Abdullāh but had no news of him. She went back to Āminah but did not tell her what she had seen or heard in order not to distress her. The entire caravan eventually returned but not with 'Abdullāh.

Later, Barakah was at 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's house when news came from Yathrib that 'Abdullāh had died. She said:

"I screamed when I heard the news. I don't know what I did after that except that I ran to Āminah's house shouting, lamenting for the absent one who would never return, lamenting for the beloved one for whom we waited so long, lamenting for the most beautiful youth of Makkah, for 'Abdullāh, the pride of the Quraysh.

"When Āminah heard the painful news, she fainted and I stayed by her bedside while she was in a state between life and death. There was no one else but me in

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"When Āminah heard the painful news, she fainted and I stayed by her bedside while she was in a state between life and death. There was no one else but me in

Āminah's house. I nursed her and looked after her during the day and through the long nights until she gave birth to her child, "Muḥammad", on a night in which the heavens were resplendent with the light of God."

When Muḥammad was born, Barakah was the first to hold him in her arms. His grandfather came and took him to the Ka'bah and with all Makkah, celebrated his birth.

Barakah stayed with Āminah while Muḥammad was sent to the *bādīyah* with the lady Ḥalimah who looked after him in the bracing atmosphere of the open desert. At the end of five years, he was brought back to Makkah and Āminah received him with tenderness and love and Barakah welcomed him "with joy, longing and admiration".

When Muḥammad was six years old, his mother decided to visit the grave of her husband, 'Abdullāh, in Yathrib. Both Barakah and 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib tried to dissuade her. Āminah however was determined. So one morning they set off - Āminah, Muḥammad and Barakah huddled together in a small *hawdaj* mounted on a large camel, part of a huge caravan that was going to Syria. In order to shield the tender child from any pain and worry, Āminah did not tell Muḥammad that she was going to visit the grave of his father.

The caravan went at a brisk pace. Barakah tried to console Āminah for her son's sake and much of the time the boy Muḥammad slept with his arms around Barakah's neck.

The caravan took ten days to reach Yathrib. The boy Muḥammad was left with his maternal uncles of the Banū Najjār while Āminah went to visit the grave of 'Abdullāh. Each day for a few weeks she stayed at the grave. She

was consumed with grief.

On the way back to Makkah, Āminah became seriously ill with fever. Halfway between Yathrib and Makkah, at a place called al-Abwā', they stopped. Āminah's health deteriorated rapidly. She was running a high temperature. The fever had got to her head and, in the pitch darkness of the night, she called out to Barakah in a choking voice.

Barakah related:

"She whispered in my ear: 'O Barakah, I shall depart from this world shortly. I commend my son Muḥammad to your care. He lost his father while he was in my abdomen. Here he is now, losing his mother under his very eyes. Be a mother to him, Barakah. And don't ever leave him.'

"My heart was shattered and I began to sob and wail. The child was distressed by my wailing and began to weep. He threw himself into his mother's arms and held tightly onto her neck. She gave one last moan and then was forever silent."

Barakah wept. She wept bitterly. With her own hands she dug a grave in the sand and buried Āminah, moistening the grave with whatever tears were left in her heart.

Barakah returned with the orphan child to Makkah and placed him in the care of his grandfather. She stayed at his house to look after him. When 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib died two years later, she went with the child to the house of his uncle Abū Ṭālib and continued to look after his needs until he was grown up and married the lady Khadijah.

Barakah then stayed with Muḥammad and Khadijah in a house belonging to Khadijah.

"I never left him and he never left me," she said.

One day Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant

him peace, called out to her and said:

“*Ya Ummāh!*” (He always called her “Mother”.) “Now I am a married man, and you are still unmarried. What do you think if someone should come now and ask to marry you?”

Barakah looked at Muḥammad and said:

“I shall never leave you. Does a mother abandon her son?”

Muḥammad smiled and kissed her head. He looked at his wife Khadijah and said to her:

“This is Barakah. This is my mother after my own mother. She is the rest of my family.”

Barakah looked at the lady Khadijah who said to her:

“Barakah, you have sacrificed your youth for the sake of Muḥammad. Now he wants to pay back some of his obligations to you. For my sake and his, agree to be married before old age overtakes you.”

“Whom shall I marry, my lady?” asked Barakah.

“There is here now ‘Ubayd ibn Zayd from the Khazraj tribe of Yathrib. He has come to us seeking your hand in marriage. For my sake, don’t refuse.”

Barakah agreed. She married ‘Ubayd ibn Zayd and went with him to Yathrib. There she gave birth to a son whom she called Ayman and from that time onwards people called her “Umm Ayman”, the mother of Ayman.

Her marriage however did not last very long. Her husband died and she returned once more to Makkah to live with her “son” Muḥammad in the house of the lady Khadijah. Living in the same household at the time were ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Hind (Khadijah’s daughter by her first husband), and Zayd ibn Hārithah.

Zayd was an Arab from the tribe of Kalb who was

captured as a boy and brought to Makkah to be sold in the slave market. He was bought by Khadijah’s nephew and put in her service. In Khadijah’s household, Zayd became attached to Muḥammad and devoted himself to his service. Their relationship was like that of a son to a father. Indeed when Zayd’s father came to Makkah in search of him, Zayd was given the choice by Muḥammad of either going with his father or staying with him. Zayd’s reply to his father was:

“I shall never leave this man. He has treated me nobly, as a father would treat his son. Not a single day have I felt that I am a slave. He has looked after me well. He is kind and loving towards me and strives for my enjoyment and happiness. He is the most noble of men and the greatest person in creation. How can I leave him and go with you?... I shall never leave him.”

Later, in public Muḥammad proclaimed the freedom of Zayd. However, Zayd continued to live with him as part of his household and devoted himself to his service.

When Muḥammad was blessed with prophethood, Barakah and Zayd were among the first to believe in the message he proclaimed. They bore with the early Muslims the persecution which the Quraysh meted out to them.

Barakah and Zayd performed invaluable services to the mission of the Prophet. They acted as part of an intelligence service exposing themselves to the persecution and punishment of the Quraysh and risking their lives to gain information on the plans and conspiracies of the *mushrikīn*.

One night the *mushrikūn* blocked off the roads leading to the House of al-Arqam where the Prophet gathered his companions regularly to instruct them in the teachings of

Islam. Barakah had some urgent information from Khadijah which had to be conveyed to the Prophet. She risked her life trying to reach the House of al-Arqam. When she arrived and conveyed the message to the Prophet, he smiled and said to her:

"You are blessed, Umm Ayman. Surely you have a place in Paradise."

When Umm Ayman left, the Prophet looked at his companions and asked:

"Should one of you desire to marry a woman from the people of Paradise, let him marry Umm Ayman."

All the companions remained silent and did not utter a word. Umm Ayman was neither beautiful nor attractive. She was by now about fifty years old and looked rather frail. Zayd ibn Hārithah however came forward and said:

"Messenger of God, I shall marry Umm Ayman. By God, she is better than women who have grace and beauty."

Zayd and Umm Ayman were married and were blessed with a son whom they named Usāmah. The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, loved Usāmah as his own son. Often he played with him, kissed him and fed him with his own hands. The Muslims would say: "He is the beloved son of the beloved." From an early age Usāmah distinguished himself in the service of Islam, and was later given weighty responsibilities by the Prophet.

When the Prophet migrated to Yathrib, henceforth to be known as al-Madīnah, he left Umm Ayman behind in Makkah to look after certain special affairs in his household. Eventually she migrated to Madīnah on her own. She made the long and difficult journey through the desert and mountainous terrain on foot. The heat was

killing and sandstorms obscured the way but she persisted, borne along by her deep love and attachment for Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. When she reached Madīnah, her feet were sore and swollen and her face was covered with sand and dust.

"*Yā Umm Ayman! Yā Ummī!* (O Umm Ayman! O my mother!) Indeed for you is a place in Paradise!" exclaimed the Prophet when he saw her. He wiped her face and eyes, massaged her feet and rubbed her shoulders with his kind and gentle hands.

In Madīnah, Umm Ayman played her full part in the affairs of the Muslims. At Uhud she distributed water to the thirsty and tended the wounded. She accompanied the Prophet on some expeditions, to Khaybar and Hunayn for example.

Her son Ayman, a devoted companion of the Prophet, was martyred at Hunayn in the eighth year after the Hijrah. Barakah's husband, Zayd, was killed at the Battle of Mu'tah in Syria after a lifetime of distinguished service to the Prophet and Islam. Barakah at this time was about seventy years old and spent much of her time at home. The Prophet, accompanied by Abū Bakr and 'Umar often visited her and asked:

"*Ya Ummī!* Are you well?" and she would reply:

"I am well, O Messenger of God, so long as Islam is well."

After the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, had died, Barakah would often be found with tears in her eyes. She was once asked, "Why are you crying?" and she replied:

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"By God, I knew that the Messenger of God would die but I cry now because the revelation from on high has

come to an end for us.”

Barakah was unique in that she was the only one who was so close to the Prophet throughout his life from birth till death. Her life was one of selfless service in the Prophet's household. She remained deeply devoted to the person of the noble, gentle and caring Prophet. Above all, her devotion to the religion of Islam was strong and unshakeable. She died during the caliphate of 'Uthmān. Her roots were unknown but her place in Paradise was assured.



2

'Umayr ibn Sa'd

'Umayr ibn Sa'd became an orphan at an early age. His father died leaving him and his mother poor and destitute. His mother eventually married again, to one of the richest men in Madinah. His name was Julās ibn Suwayd who was from the powerful tribe of al-Aws.

'Umayr was well looked after by Julās and loved him as a son would love a father. Indeed he began to forget that he was an orphan. As 'Umayr grew older, Julās' fondness and love for him grew. Julās would marvel at the intelligence he displayed in everything he did and at the honesty and trustworthiness which characterized his behaviour.

When he was barely ten years old, 'Umayr became a Muslim. Faith found in his tender heart a secure niche and penetrated deeply into his being. In spite of youthfulness, he would never delay in the performance of *Ṣalāt* behind the noble Prophet. Often he would be found in the first row of worshippers, hoping for the *thawāb* promised those who attend mosques early and sit in the foremost rows. His mother was particularly pleased whenever she saw him going to and coming from the mosque, sometimes with her husband and sometimes alone.

'Umayr's days passed in this fashion with no major disturbance to upset his calm and contentment. This idyllic state, however, could not last forever. 'Umayr was soon to face a most difficult test for a boy of his age, a test which shook the peaceful and loving atmosphere of his home and challenged the steadfastness of his faith.

In the ninth year after the Hijrah, the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, announced his intention to lead an expedition to Tabūk against the Byzantine forces. He ordered the Muslims to get themselves ready and make the necessary preparations.

Usually when the Prophet wanted to go on a military campaign he would not give precise details of his objective or he would set off in a direction opposite to his intended destination. This was for security purposes and to confound the enemy's intelligence service. This he did not do in announcing the expedition to Tabūk. This was perhaps because of the great distance of Tabūk from Madinah, the enormous difficulties expected and the overwhelming strength of the enemy.

The preparations needed for this expedition had to be extensive. In spite of the fact that summer had set in and the intense heat produced languor and listlessness, and in spite of the fact that the date crops needed harvesting, the Muslims responded enthusiastically to the call of the Prophet and busied themselves in preparing for the arduous campaign ahead.

There was however a group of *munāfiqūn* or hypocrites who outwardly had declared their acceptance of Islam but inwardly did not believe in it. They were critical of the expedition and tried to weaken the resolve of the Muslims. They even ridiculed the Prophet in their private

gatherings. Disbelief and hatred remained in their hearts.

One day, shortly before the army was due to set out, the young 'Umayr ibn Sa'd returned home after performing *Ṣalāt* in the mosque. He was all agog with excitement. He had just witnessed the great generosity and the spontaneous spirit of sacrifice which the Muslims displayed in preparing for the expedition. He had seen women of the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār donating their jewellery and their ornaments to buy provisions and equipment for the army. He had seen 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān handing over a purse containing a thousand gold dinars to the Prophet and 'Abdur Raḥmān ibn 'Awf carrying on his shoulders two hundred *awqīyah* of gold and placing it before the noble Prophet. Indeed he had even seen a man trying to sell his bed in order to purchase a sword for himself.

At home, he recalled these moving and inspiring scenes. He was surprised however that Julās was so slow in preparing for the expedition with the Prophet and at his delay in contributing, especially since he was quite rich and could afford to give generously. 'Umayr felt that he had to arouse his ardour or stir his sense of generosity and manliness. So with great enthusiasm he related what he had seen and heard at the mosque particularly the case of those believers who, with great fervour, had come to enlist themselves in the army and were turned away by the Prophet because there was not sufficient means of transport. He related how sad and disappointed these people were at not realizing their desire to go on the path of *jihād* and sacrifice for the sake of Islam.

Julās' response was sharp and shocking.

"If Muḥammad is true in claiming that he is a Prophet,"

he shouted angrily, "then we are all worse than donkeys."

'Umayr was flabbergasted. He could not believe what he had heard. He did not think that a man as intelligent as Julās could have uttered such words, words which put him instantly outside the pale of faith.

A host of questions raced through his mind and he immediately began to consider what action he should take. He saw in Julās' silence and his tardiness to respond to the Prophet's call, clear signs of a traitor to God and His Prophet, who wanted to bring harm to Islam in just the same way as the munāfiqūn who were plotting and conspiring against the Prophet. At the same time he saw a man who had treated him as a father and who was kind and generous to him, who had taken him as an orphan and had saved him from poverty.

'Umayr had to choose between preserving this close relationship with Julās on the one hand and dealing with his treachery and hypocrisy on the other. The choice was painful but his decision was swift. He turned to Julās and said:

"By God, O Julās, there is no one on the face of the earth, after Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh, dearer to me than you. You are the closest of men to me and you have been most generous to me. But you have uttered words which, if I should mention them, will expose and humiliate you. If I conceal them, however, I will be a traitor to my trust and destroy myself and my religion. I will, therefore, go to the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, and tell him what you have said. It is up to you to clarify your position."

The young 'Umayr went to the mosque and told the Prophet what he had heard from Julās. The Prophet asked

him to stay with him and sent one of his companions to summon Julās.

Julās came, greeted the Prophet and sat in front of him. The Prophet, peace be upon him, straightaway asked him:

"What did you say that 'Umayr ibn Sa'd heard?" and he mentioned what 'Umayr had reported to him.

"He has lied against me, O Messenger of God, and has fabricated this. I have not uttered anything of the sort," asserted Julās.

The companions of the Prophet looked alternately at Julās and 'Umayr hoping to detect on their faces what their hearts concealed. They began to mutter among themselves. One of those in whose hearts was the disease of hypocrisy asserted:

"The youth is a nuisance. He is bent on defaming someone who has been good to him."

Others replied:

"Not at all. He is a youth who grew up in obedience to God. The expressions on his face attest to his truthfulness."

The Prophet, peace be on him, turned to 'Umayr and saw his flushed face and the tears streaming down his cheeks. 'Umayr prayed:

"O Lord, send down a revelation on Your Prophet to verify what I have told him."

Julās, meanwhile, continued to defend what he had said:

"What I have told you, O Messenger of God, is certainly the truth. If you wish, make us swear an oath in your presence. I swear by God that I did not say anything of the sort that 'Umayr reported to you."

As the companions turned to 'Umayr to hear what he had to say, they saw the Prophet come under a special

he shouted angrily, "then we are all worse than donkeys."

'Umayr was flabbergasted. He could not believe what he had heard. He did not think that a man as intelligent as Julās could have uttered such words, words which put him instantly outside the pale of faith.

A host of questions raced through his mind and he immediately began to consider what action he should take. He saw in Julās' silence and his tardiness to respond to the Prophet's call, clear signs of a traitor to God and His Prophet, who wanted to bring harm to Islam in just the same way as the munāfiqūn who were plotting and conspiring against the Prophet. At the same time he saw a man who had treated him as a father and who was kind and generous to him, who had taken him as an orphan and had saved him from poverty.

'Umayr had to choose between preserving this close relationship with Julās on the one hand and dealing with his treachery and hypocrisy on the other. The choice was painful but his decision was swift. He turned to Julās and said:

"By God, O Julās, there is no one on the face of the earth, after Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh, dearer to me than you. You are the closest of men to me and you have been most generous to me. But you have uttered words which, if I should mention them, will expose and humiliate you. If I conceal them, however, I will be a traitor to my trust and destroy myself and my religion. I will, therefore, go to the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, and tell him what you have said. It is up to you to clarify your position."

The young 'Umayr went to the mosque and told the Prophet what he had heard from Julās. The Prophet asked

him to stay with him and sent one of his companions to summon Julās.

Julās came, greeted the Prophet and sat in front of him. The Prophet, peace be upon him, straightaway asked him:

"What did you say that 'Umayr ibn Sa'd heard?" and he mentioned what 'Umayr had reported to him.

"He has lied against me, O Messenger of God, and has fabricated this. I have not uttered anything of the sort," asserted Julās.

The companions of the Prophet looked alternately at Julās and 'Umayr hoping to detect on their faces what their hearts concealed. They began to mutter among themselves. One of those in whose hearts was the disease of hypocrisy asserted:

"The youth is a nuisance. He is bent on defaming someone who has been good to him."

Others replied:

"Not at all. He is a youth who grew up in obedience to God. The expressions on his face attest to his truthfulness."

The Prophet, peace be on him, turned to 'Umayr and saw his flushed face and the tears streaming down his cheeks. 'Umayr prayed:

"O Lord, send down a revelation on Your Prophet to verify what I have told him."

Julās, meanwhile, continued to defend what he had said:

"What I have told you, O Messenger of God, is certainly the truth. If you wish, make us swear an oath in your presence. I swear by God that I did not say anything of the sort that 'Umayr reported to you."

As the companions turned to 'Umayr to hear what he had to say, they saw the Prophet come under a special

mood of serenity and they realized that he was being inspired. Immediately there was complete silence as they gazed intently at the Prophet in anticipation.

At this point, fear and terror gripped Julās and he began to look tremulously at ‘Umayr. The Prophet, having received the revelation, recited the words of God:

“(The hypocrites) swear by God that they have said (nothing wrong); yet most certainly they have uttered a saying which is a denial of the truth, and have thus denied the truth after having professed their self-surrender to God; for they were aiming at something which was beyond their reach. And they could find no fault (with the Faith) save that God had enriched them and (caused) His Messenger to enrich them out of His bounty. Hence, if they repent, it will be for their own good; but if they turn away, God will cause them to suffer a grievous suffering in this world and in the life to come and they will find no helper on earth, and none to give them succour.” (*The Qur’ān*, Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9: 74).

Julās trembled with fear at what he heard and in his anguish, could hardly speak. Finally, he turned to the Prophet and said:

“I do repent, O Messenger of God. I do repent. ‘Umayr told the truth and I lied. I beseech God to accept my repentance...”

The Prophet turned to the young ‘Umayr. Tears of joy moistened his youthful face, radiant with the light of faith. With his noble hand, the Prophet tenderly took his ear and said:

“Young man, your ear has been true in what it heard and your Lord has confirmed the truth of what you said.”

Julās returned to the fold of Islam and was a good and

faithful Muslim thereafter. The companions realized that by his generosity and good treatment of ‘Umayr, he had reformed. Whenever ‘Umayr was mentioned, Julās would say:

“My God reward ‘Umayr with goodness on my behalf. He certainly saved me from *kufṛ* and preserved my neck from the fire of hell.”

* * *

‘Umayr grew up and distinguished himself in later years with the same devotion and firmness which he had shown in early life.

During the caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the people of Ḥimṣ in Syria complained much and bitterly of the governors appointed to the city even though ‘Umar in particular used to pay special attention to the type of men he chose as his provincial governors. In selecting a governor, ‘Umar would say:

“I want a man who when he is among the people and is not their *amīr*, should not behave as their *amīr*, and when he is among them as an *amīr*, he should behave as one of them.

“I want a governor who will not distinguish himself from the people by the clothes he wears, or the food he eats or the house he lives in.”

“I want a governor who would establish Ṣalāt among the people, treat them equitably and with justice and does not close his door when they come to him in need.”

In the light of the complaints of the people of Ḥimṣ and going by his own criteria for a good governor, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb decided to appoint ‘Umayr ibn Sa‘d as

governor of the region. This was despite the fact that 'Umayr at that time was at the head of a Muslim army traversing the Arabian peninsula and the region of great Syria, liberating towns, destroying enemy fortifications, pacifying the tribes and establishing masjids wherever he went. 'Umayr accepted the appointment as governor of Ḥimṣ reluctantly because he preferred nothing better than jihād in the path of God. He was still quite young, in his early twenties.

When 'Umayr reached Ḥimṣ he called the inhabitants to a vast congregational prayer. When the prayer was over he addressed them. He began by praising and giving thanks to God and sending peace and blessings on His Prophet Muḥammad. Then he said:

"O people! Islam is a mighty fortress and a sturdy gate. The fortress of Islam is justice and its gate is truth. If you destroy the fortress and demolish the gate you would undermine the defences of this religion.

"Islam will remain strong so long as the Sulṭān or central authority is strong. The strength of the Sulṭān neither comes from flogging with the whip, nor killing with the sword but from ruling with justice and holding fast to truth."

'Umayr spent a full year in Ḥimṣ during which, it is said, he did not write a single letter to the Amīr al-Mu'minīn. Nor did he send any taxes to the central treasury in Madīnah, neither a dirham nor a dinar.

'Umar was always concerned about the performance of his governors and was afraid that positions of authority would corrupt them. As far as he was concerned, there was no one who was free from sin and corrupting influences apart from the noble Prophet, peace be upon

him.

He summoned his secretary and said:

"Write to 'Umayr ibn Sa'd and say to him: 'When the letter of the Amīr al-Mu'minīn reaches you, leave Ḥimṣ and come to him and bring with you whatever taxes you have collected from the Muslims.'"

'Umayr received the letter. He took his food pouch and hung his eating, drinking and washing utensils over his shoulder. He took his spear and left Ḥimṣ and the governorship behind him. He set off for Madīnah on foot.

As 'Umayr approached Madīnah, he was badly sunburnt, his body was gaunt and his hair had grown long. His appearance showed all the signs of the long and arduous journey. 'Umar, on seeing him, was astonished.

"What's wrong with you, 'Umayr?" he asked with deep concern.

"Nothing is wrong with me, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn," replied 'Umayr. "I am fine and healthy, praise be to God, and I carry with me all (my) worldly possessions."

"And what worldly possessions have you got?" asked 'Umar thinking that he was carrying money for the *Bayt al-māl* or treasury of the Muslims."

"I have my pouch in which I put my food provisions. I have this vessel from which I eat and which I use for washing my hair and clothes. And I have this cup for making *wuḍū* and drinking..."

"Did you come on foot?" asked 'Umar.

"Yes, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn."

"Weren't you given from your amirship an animal to ride on?"

"They did not give me one and I did not ask them."

"And where is the amount you brought for the *Bayt al-*

māl ?

"I didn't bring anything."

"And why not?"

"When I arrived at Hims," said 'Umayr, "I called the righteous persons of the town to a meeting and gave them the responsibility of collecting the taxes. Whenever they collected any amounts of money I would seek their advice and spent it (all) on those who were deserving among them."

At this point, 'Umar turned to his secretary and said:

"Renew the appointment of 'Umayr to the governorship of Hims."

"Oh, come now," protested 'Umayr. "That is something which I do not desire. I shall not be a governor for you nor for anyone after you, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn."

With that 'Umayr asked the Khalifah's permission to go to his village on the outskirts of Madīnah to live there with his family. This 'Umar granted.

A long time passed since 'Umayr had gone to his village and 'Umar decided to put him through a test to make sure of his circumstances. He said to one of his trusted aides called al-Hārith:

"Al-Hārith, go to 'Umayr ibn Sa'd and stay with him as though you were a guest. If you see on him any signs of luxury or good living, return quietly as you went. If, however, you find him in straitened circumstances give him these dinars." 'Umar handed al-Hārith a bag with a hundred dinars.

Al-Hārith set out for 'Umayr's village and found his home after making enquiries.

"*As-salāmu 'alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,*" he greeted 'Umayr.

"*Wa 'alaykum as-salām wa raḥmatullāhi wa barakātuhu,*" replied 'Umayr and asked, "From where have you come?"

"From al-Madīnah."

"How are the Muslims there?"

"Fine."

"How is the Amīr al-Mu'minīn?"

"He is fine and doing well."

"Has he applied the ḥudūd laws?"

"Yes. He carried out the sentence of punishment on his own son for committing the crime of adultery. His son died as a result of the punishment." Al-Hārith continued:

"O God, help 'Umar. I only know that he has a great love for you."

Al-Hārith stayed as 'Umayr's guest for three nights. On each night he was given only a small flat piece of barley bread. On the third day a local man said to Hārith:

"'Umayr and his family are suffering great hardship. They only have these loaves which they have given you in preference to themselves. They are hungry and in great distress."

Al-Hārith went to 'Umayr and gave him the bag of money.

"What is this?" asked 'Umayr.

"The Amīr al-Mu'minīn sent it to you."

"Return it to him. Give him my greetings of peace and tell him that 'Umayr has no need of it."

"Take it, O 'Umayr," shouted his wife who was listening to the conversation between her husband and his guest. "If you need it, you can spend it. If not, you can spend it in other appropriate ways, for those in need here are many."

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When al-Ḥārith heard what she had said, he placed the dinars in front of 'Umayr and left. 'Umayr took the money and placed it in a small bag. He only went to sleep that night after he had distributed the money to those in need and especially to the children of those who had been martyred.

Al-Ḥārith returned to Madīnah and was questioned by 'Umar al-Fārūq.

"What have you seen, al-Ḥārith?"

"A very distressing situation, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn."

"Did you give him the dinars?"

"Yes, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn."

"What did he do with them?"

"I don't know. But I think that he did not keep a single dirham of it for himself."

Al-Fārūq wrote to 'Umayr: "When you receive this letter, do not put it down until you come to me."

'Umayr proceeded straightaway to Madīnah. 'Umar greeted and welcomed him and proceeded to question him.

"What did you do with the dinars, 'Umayr?"

"You have no responsibility for the money after you have donated it to me."

"I adjure you to tell me what you did with it."

"I stored it away for myself so that I could benefit from it a day when neither wealth nor children will be of any avail."

Tears came to 'Umar's eyes as he said:

"I swear that you are one of those who are hard against themselves even when they are in dire need." And he ordered a camel load of food and two garments to be given to 'Umayr who protested:

"About the food, we do not need it, O 'Amīr al-Muminīn. I left two *sā'as* of barley with my family and when we have finished that, God - Great and Exalted is He - will provide. As for the two garments, I will take them for (my wife). Her dress is now in tatters and she is almost naked."

Not long after that meeting with 'Umar al-Fārūq, 'Umayr ibn Sa'd passed away to his Lord. He was not weighted down with the cares and burdens of the world and he was concerned to provide plenty of provisions for the hereafter. 'Umar received the news of his death with a heavy heart and said in deep sorrow:

"I have wished to have men like 'Umayr ibn Sa'd whose help I could seek in dealing with the affairs of Muslims."

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3

Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamān

“If you wish you may consider yourself among the Muhājirīn or, if you wish, you may consider yourself one of the Anṣār. Choose whichever is dearer to you.”

With these words, the Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamān when he met him for the first time in Makkah. How did Hudhayfah come to have this choice?

His father, al-Yamān, was a Makkan from the tribe of ‘Abs. He had killed someone and had been forced to leave Makkah. He had settled down in Yathrib, becoming an ally (*ḥalīf*) of the Banū ‘Abd al-Ash-hal and marrying into the tribe. A son named Hudhayfah was born to him. The restrictions on his returning to Makkah were eventually lifted and he divided his time between Makkah and Yathrib but stayed more in Yathrib and was more attached to it.

This was how Hudhayfah had a Makkan origin but a Yathribite upbringing. When the rays of Islam began to radiate over the Arabian peninsula, a delegation from the ‘Abs tribe, which included al-Yamān, went to the Prophet and announced their acceptance of Islam. That was before the Prophet migrated to Yathrib.

Hudhayfah grew up in a Muslim household and was taught by both his mother and father who were among the first persons from Yathrib to enter the religion of God. He therefore became a Muslim before meeting the Prophet, peace be upon him.

Hudhayfah longed to meet the Prophet. From an early age, he was keen on following whatever news there was about him. The more he heard, the more his affection for the Prophet grew and the more he longed to meet him.

He eventually journeyed to Makkah, met the Prophet and put the question to him:

“Am I a Muhājir or am I an Anṣārī, O Rasūlullāh?”

“If you wish you may consider yourself among the Muhājirīn, or if you wish you may consider yourself one of the Anṣār. Choose whichever is dearer to you,” replied the Prophet.

“Well, I am an Anṣārī. O Rasūlullāh,” decided Hudhayfah.

At Madīnah, after the Hijrah, Hudhayfah became closely attached to the Prophet. He participated in all the military engagements except Badr. Explaining why he missed the Battle of Badr, he said:

“I would not have missed Badr if my father and I had not been outside Madīnah. The disbelieving Quraysh met us and asked where we were going. We told them we were going to Madīnah and they asked whether we intended to meet Muḥammad. We insisted that we only wanted to go to Madīnah. They allowed us to go only after they extracted from us an undertaking not to help Muḥammad against them and not to fight along with them.

“When we came to the Prophet we told him about our undertaking to the Quraysh and asked him what should

we do. He said that we should honour the undertaking and seek God's help against them."

Ḥudhayfah participated in the Battle of Uḥud with his father. The pressure on Ḥudhayfah during the battle was great but he acquitted himself well and emerged safe and sound. A rather different fate, however, awaited his father.

Before the battle, the Prophet left al-Yamān and Thābit ibn Waqsh with the other non-combatants including women and children. This was because they were both quite old. As the fighting grew fiercer, al-Yamān said to his friend:

"You have no father (meaning you have no cares). What are we waiting for? We both have only a short time to live. Why don't we take our swords and join the Messenger of God, peace be on him? Maybe, God will bless us with martyrdom beside His Prophet."

They quickly prepared for battle and were soon in the thick of the fighting. Thābit ibn Waqsh was blessed with *shahādah* at the hands of the *mushrikīn*. The father of Ḥudhayfah, however, was set upon by some Muslims who did not recognize who he was. As they flayed him, Ḥudhayfah cried out:

"My father! My father! It's my father!"

No one heard him. The old man fell, killed in error by the swords of his own brothers in faith. They were filled with pain and remorse. Grieved as he was, Ḥudhayfah said to them:

"May God forgive you for He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy."

The Prophet, peace be on him, wanted *diyah* (compensation) to be paid to Ḥudhayfah for the death of his father but Ḥudhayfah said:

"He was simply seeking *shahādah* and he attained it. O Lord, bear witness that I donate the compensation for him to the Muslims."

Because of this attitude, Ḥudhayfah's stature grew in the eyes of the Prophet, peace be on him. Ḥudhayfah had three qualities which particularly impressed the Prophet: his unique intelligence which he employed in dealing with difficult situations; his quick wittedness and spontaneous response to the call of action, and his ability to keep a secret even under persistent questioning.

A noticeable policy of the Prophet was to bring out and use the special qualities and strengths of each individual companion of his. In deploying his companions, he was careful to choose the right man for the right task. This he did to excellent advantage in the case of Ḥudhayfah.

One of the gravest problems the Muslims of Madinah had to face was the existence in their midst of hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) particularly from among the Jews and their allies. Although many of them had declared their acceptance of Islam, the change was only superficial and they continued to plot and intrigue against the Prophet and the Muslims.

Because of Ḥudhayfah's ability to keep a secret, the Prophet, peace be on him, confided in him the names of the *munāfiqīn*. It was a weighty secret which the Prophet did not disclose to any other of his companions. He gave Ḥudhayfah the task of watching the movements of the *munāfiqīn*, following their activities, and shielding the Muslims from the sinister danger they represented. It was a tremendous responsibility. The *munāfiqūn*, because they acted in secrecy and because they knew all the

developments and plans of the Muslims from within, presented a greater threat to the community than the outright hostility of the *kuffār*.

From this time onwards, Hudhayfah was called "The Keeper of the Secret of God's Messenger". Throughout his life he remained faithful to his pledge not to disclose the names of the hypocrites. After the death of the Prophet, the Khalifah often came to him to seek his advice concerning their movements and activities but he remained tight-lipped and cautious.

'Umar was only able to find out indirectly who the hypocrites were. If anyone among the Muslims died, 'Umar would ask:

"Has Hudhayfah attended his funeral prayer?"

If the reply was 'yes', he would perform the prayer. If the reply was 'no', he became doubtful about the person and refrained from performing the funeral prayer for him.

Once 'Umar asked Hudhayfah:

"Is any of my governors a *munāfiq*?"

"One," replied Hudhayfah.

"Point him out to me," ordered 'Umar.

"That I shall not do," insisted Hudhayfah who later said that shortly after their conversation 'Umar dismissed the person just as if he had been guided to him.

Hudhayfah's special qualities were made use of by the Prophet, peace be on him, at various times. One of the most testing of such occasions, which required the use of Hudhayfah's intelligence and his presence of mind, was during the Battle of the Trench. The Muslims on that occasion were surrounded by enemies. The siege they had been placed under had dragged on. The Muslims were undergoing severe hardship and difficulties. They

had expended practically all their effort and were utterly exhausted. So intense was the strain that some even began to despair.

The Quraysh and their allies, meanwhile, were not much better off. Their strength and determination had been sapped. A violent wind overturned their tents, extinguished their fires and pelted their faces and eyes with gusts of sand and dust.

In such decisive moments in the history of warfare, the side that loses is the one that despairs first and the one that wins is the one that holds out longer. The role of army intelligence in such situations often proves to be a crucial factor in determining the outcome of the battle.

At this stage of the confrontation the Prophet, peace be on him, felt he could use the special talents and experience of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamān. He decided to send Hudhayfah into the midst of the enemy's positions under cover of darkness to bring him the latest information on their situation and morale before he decided on his next move.

Let us now leave Hudhayfah to relate what happened on this mission fraught with danger and even death.

"That night, we were all seated in rows. Abū Sufyān and his men - the mushrikūn of Makkah - were camped in front of us. The Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayzah were at our rear and we were afraid of them because of our wives and children. The night was stygian dark. Never before was there a darker night nor a wind so strong. So dark was the night that no one could see his fingers and the blast of the wind was like the peel of thunder.

"The hypocrites began to ask the Prophet for permission to leave, saying, 'Our houses are exposed to the enemy.'

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At this stage of the confrontation the Prophet, peace be on him, felt he could use the special talents and experience of Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān. He decided to send Ḥudhayfah into the midst of the enemy's positions under cover of darkness to bring him the latest information on their situation and morale before he decided on his next move.

Let us now leave Ḥudhayfah to relate what happened on this mission fraught with danger and even death.

"That night, we were all seated in rows. Abū Sufyān and his men - the *mushrikūn* of Makkah - were camped in front of us. The Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayzah were at our rear and we were afraid of them because of our wives and children. The night was stygian dark. Never before was there a darker night nor a wind so strong. So dark was the night that no one could see his fingers and the blast of the wind was like the peel of thunder.

"The hypocrites began to ask the Prophet for permission to leave, saying, 'Our houses are exposed to the enemy.'

Anyone who asked the Prophet's permission to leave was allowed to go. Many thus sneaked away until we were left with about three hundred men.

"The Prophet then began a round of inspection passing us one by one until he reached me. I had nothing to protect me from the cold except a blanket belonging to my wife which scarcely reached my knees. He came nearer to me as I lay crouching on the ground and asked:

'Who is this?'

'Hudhayfah,' I replied.

'Hudhayfah?' he queried as I huddled myself closer to the ground, too afraid to stand up because of the intense hunger and cold.

'Yes, O Messenger of God,' I replied.

'Something is happening among the people (meaning the forces of Abū Sufyān). Infiltrate their encampment and bring me news of what's happening,' instructed the Prophet.

"I set out. At that moment I was the most terrified person of all and felt terribly cold. The Prophet, peace be on him, prayed:

'O Lord, protect him from in front and from behind, from his right and from his left, from above and from below.'

"By God, no sooner had the Prophet, peace be on him, completed his supplication than God removed from my stomach all traces of fear and from my body all the punishing cold. As I turned to go, the Prophet called me back to him and said:

'Hudhayfah, on no account do anything among the people (of the opposing forces) until you come back to me.'

'Yes,' I replied.

"I went on, inching my way under cover of darkness until I penetrated deep into the *mushrikīn* camp and became just like one of them. Shortly afterwards, Abū Sufyān got up and began to address his men:

'O people of the Quraysh, I am about to make a statement to you which I fear would reach Muḥammad. Therefore, let every man among you look and make sure who is sitting next to him...'

"On hearing this, I immediately grasped the hand of the man next to me and asked, 'Who are you?' (thus putting him on the defensive and clearing myself).

"Abū Sufyān went on:

'O people of the Quraysh, by God, you are not in a safe and secure place. Our horses and camels have perished. The Banū Qurayzah have deserted us and we have had unpleasant news about them. We are buffered by this bitterly cold wind. Our fires do not light and our uprooted tents offer no protection. So get moving. For myself, I am leaving.'

"He went to his camel, untethered and mounted it. He struck it and it stood upright. If the Messenger of God, peace be on him, had not instructed me to do nothing until I returned to him, I would have killed Abū Sufyān then and there with an arrow.

"I returned to the Prophet and found him standing on a blanket performing Ṣalāt. When he recognized me, he drew me close to his legs and threw one end of the blanket over me. I informed him of what had happened. He was extremely happy and joyful and gave thanks and praise to God."

Hudhayfah lived in constant dread of evil and corrupting influences. He felt that goodness and the sources of good in this life were easy to recognize for those who desired good. But it was evil that was deceptive and often difficult to perceive and combat.

He became something of a great moral philosopher. He always warned people to struggle against evil with all their faculties, with their heart, hands and tongue. Those who stood against evil only with their hearts and tongues, and not with their hands, he considered as having abandoned a part of truth. Those who hated evil only in their hearts but did not combat it with their tongues and hands forsook two parts of truth and those who neither detested nor confronted evil with their hearts, tongues or hands he considered as physically alive but morally dead.

Speaking about 'hearts' and their relationship to guidance and error, he once said:

"There are four kinds of hearts.

The heart that is encased or atrophied. That is the heart of the *kāfir* or ungrateful disbeliever.

The heart that is shaped into thin layers. That is the heart of the *munāfiq* or hypocrite.

The heart that is open and bare and on which shines a radiant light. That is the heart of the *mu'min* or the believer.

Finally there is the heart in which there is both hypocrisy and faith. Faith is like a tree which thrives with good water and hypocrisy is like an abscess which thrives on pus and blood. Whichever flourishes more, be it the tree of faith or the abscess of hypocrisy, wins control of the heart."

Hudhayfah's experience with hypocrisy and his efforts

to combat it gave a touch of sharpness and severity to his tongue. He himself realized this and admitted it with a noble courage:

"I went to the Prophet, peace be on him and said: 'O Messenger of God, I have a tongue which is sharp and cutting against my family and I fear that this would lead me to hell-fire.' And the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to me: 'Where do you stand with regard to *istighfār* - asking forgiveness from Allāh? I ask Allāh for forgiveness a hundred times during the day.'"

A pensive man like Hudhayfah, one devoted to thought, knowledge and reflection, may not have been expected to perform feats of heroism in battlefields. Yet Hudhayfah was to prove himself one of the foremost Muslim military commanders in the expansion of Islam into 'Irāq. He distinguished himself at Hamadhān, ar-Rayy, ad-Daynawar, and at the famous Battle of Nihāwand.

For the encounter at Nihāwand against the Persian forces, Hudhayfah was placed second in command by 'Umar over the entire Muslim forces which numbered some thirty thousand. The Persian forces outnumbered them by five to one being some one hundred and fifty thousand strong. The first commander of the Muslim army, an-Nu'mān ibn Maqran, fell early in the battle. The second in command, Hudhayfah, immediately took charge of the situation, giving instructions that the death of the commander should not be broadcast. Under Hudhayfah's daring and inspiring leadership, the Muslims won a decisive victory despite tremendous odds.

Hudhayfah was made governor of important places like Kūfā and Ctesiphon (al-Madā'in). When the news of his appointment as governor of Ctesiphon reached its

inhabitants, crowds went out to meet and greet this famous companion of the Prophet of whose piety and righteousness they had heard so much. His great role in the conquests of Persia was already a legend.

As the welcoming party waited, a lean, somewhat scrawny man with dangling feet astride a donkey approached. In his hand he held a loaf of bread and some salt and he ate as he went along. When the rider was already in their midst they realized that he was Hudhayfah, the governor for whom they were waiting. They could not contain their surprise. What manner of man was this! They could however be excused for not recognizing him for they were used to the style, the pomp and the grandeur of Persian rulers.

Hudhayfah carried on and people crowded around him. He saw they were expecting him to speak and he cast a searching look at their faces. Eventually, he said:

“Beware of places of *fitnah* and intrigue.”

“And what,” they asked, “are places of intrigue?”

He replied:

“The doors of rulers where some people go and try to make the ruler or governor believe lies and praise him for (qualities) he does not possess.”

With these words, the people were prepared for what to expect from their new governor. They knew at once that there was nothing in the world that he despised more than hypocrisy.



4

Ja'far ibn Abī Talib

In spite of his noble standing among the Quraysh, Abū Ṭālib, an uncle of the Prophet, was quite poor. He had a large family and did not have enough means to support them adequately. His poverty-stricken situation became much worse when a severe drought hit the Arabian peninsula. The drought destroyed vegetation and livestock and, it is said, people were driven to eat bones in the struggle for survival.

It was during this time of drought, before his call to prophethood, that Muḥammad said to his uncle, al-‘Abbās:

“Your brother, Abū Ṭālib, has a large family. People as you see have been afflicted by this severe drought and are facing starvation. Let us go to Abū Ṭālib and take over responsibility for some of his family. I will take one of his sons and you can take another and we will look after them.”

“What you suggest is certainly righteous and commendable,” replied al-‘Abbās, and together they went to Abū Ṭālib and said to him:

“We want to ease some of the burden of your family until such time as this distressing period has gone.”

Abū Ṭālib agreed.

"If you allow me to keep 'Aqīl (one of his sons older than 'Alī), then you may do whatever you like," he said.

It was in this way that Muḥammad took 'Alī into his household and al-'Abbās took Ja'far into his.

Ja'far had a very close resemblance to the Prophet. It is said there were five men from the Hāshim clan who resembled the Prophet so much, they were often mistaken for him. They were: Abū Sufyān ibn al-Hārith and Qutham ibn al-'Abbās - both of whom were cousins of his; as-Sā'ib ibn 'Ubayd, the grandfather of Imām ash-Shāfi'i; al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī, the grandson of the Prophet, who resembled him most of all; and Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib.

Ja'far stayed with his uncle, al-'Abbās, until he was a young man. Then he married Asmā' bint Umayy, a sister of Maymūnah who was later to become a wife of the Prophet. After his marriage, Ja'far went to live on his own. He and his wife were among the first persons to accept Islam. He became a Muslim at the hands of Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, may God be pleased with him.

The young Ja'far and his wife were devoted followers of Islam. They bore the harsh treatment and the persecution of the Quraysh with patience and steadfastness because they both realized that the road to Paradise was strewn with thorns and paved with pain and hardship.

The Quraysh made life intolerable for them both and for their brethren in faith. They tried to obstruct them from observing or performing the duties and rites of Islam. They prevented them from tasting the full sweetness of worship undisturbed. The Quraysh waylaid them at every turn and severely restricted their freedom of movement.

Ja'far eventually went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and sought permission for himself and a small group

of the Ṣaḥābah, including his wife, to make *hijrah* to the land of Abyssinia. With great sadness, the Prophet gave his permission. It pained him that these pure and righteous souls should be forced to leave their homes and the familiar and cherished scenes and memories of their childhood and youth, not for any crime but only because they said, "Our Lord is One. Allāh is our Lord."

The group of Muhājirīn left Makkah bound for the land of Abyssinia. Leading them was Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib. Soon they settled down in this new land under the care and protection of the Negus, the just and righteous ruler of Abyssinia. For the first time since they became Muslims, they savoured the taste of freedom and security and enjoyed the sweetness of worship undisturbed.

When the Quraysh learnt of the departure of the small group of Muslims and the peaceful life they enjoyed under the protection of the Negus, they made plans to secure their extradition and their return to the great prison that was Makkah. They sent two of their most formidable men, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Rabi'āh, to accomplish this task and loaded them with valuable and attractive presents for the Negus and his bishops.

In Abyssinia, the two Quraysh emissaries first presented their gifts to the bishops and to each of them they said:

"There are some wicked young people moving about freely in the King's land. They have attacked the religion of their forefathers and caused disunity among their people. When we speak to the King about them, advise him to surrender them to us without his asking them about their religion. The respected leaders of their own people are more aware of them and know better what they believe."

The bishops agreed.

'Amr and 'Abdullāh then went to the Negus himself and presented him with gifts which he greatly admired. They said to him:

"O King, there is a group of evil persons from among our youth who have escaped to your kingdom. They practice a religion which neither we nor you know. They have forsaken our religion and have not entered into your religion. The respected leaders of their people - from among their own parents and uncles and from their own clans - have sent us to you to request you to return them. They know best what trouble they have caused."

The Negus looked towards his bishops who said:

"They speak the truth, O King. Their own people know them better and are better acquainted with what they have done. Send them back so that they themselves might judge them."

The Negus was quite angry with this suggestion and said:

"No! By God, I won't surrender them to anyone until I myself call them and question them about what they have been accused. If what these two men have said is true, then I will hand them over to you. If however it is not so, then I shall protect them so long as they desire to remain under my protection."

The Negus then summoned the Muslims to meet him. Before going, they consulted with one another as a group and agreed that Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib and no one else should speak on their behalf.

In the court of the Negus, the bishops, dressed in green surplises and impressive headgear, were seated on his right and on his left. The Qurayshite emissaries were also seated when the Muslims entered and took their seats.

The Negus turned to them and asked:

"What is this religion which you have introduced for yourself and which has served to cut you off from the religion of your people? You also did not enter my religion nor the religion of any other community."

Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib then advanced and made a speech that was moving and eloquent and which is still one of the most compelling descriptions of Islam, the appeal of the noble Prophet and the message and method of Islam. He said:

"O King, we were a people in a state of ignorance and immorality, worshipping idols and eating the flesh of dead animals, committing all sorts of abomination and shameful deeds, breaking the ties of kinship, treating guests badly and the strong among us exploited the weak.

"We remained in this state until God sent us a Prophet, one of our own people whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness and integrity were well-known to us.

"He called us to worship God alone and to renounce the stones and the idols which we and our ancestors used to worship besides God.

"He commanded us to speak the truth, to honour our promises, to be kind to our relations, to be helpful to our neighbours, to cease all forbidden acts, to abstain from bloodshed, to avoid obscenities and false witness, not to appropriate an orphan's property nor slander chaste women.

"He ordered us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, to uphold Prayer, to give Zakāt and fast in the month of Ramaḍān.

"We believed in him and what he brought to us from God and we follow him in what he has asked us to do

and we keep away from what he forbade us from doing.

"Thereupon, O King, our people attacked us, visited the severest punishment on us to make us renounce our religion and take us back to the old immorality and the worship of idols.

"They oppressed us, made life intolerable for us and obstructed us from observing our religion. So we left for your country, choosing you before anyone else, desiring your protection and hoping to live in justice and in peace in your midst."

It was a passionate and moving speech. The Negus was greatly impressed and was eager to hear more. He asked Ja'far:

"Do you have with you something of what your Prophet brought concerning God?"

"Yes," replied Ja'far.

"Then read it to me," requested the Negus.

Ja'far, in his rich, melodious voice recited for him the first portion of *Sūrah Maryam* which deals with the story of Jesus and his mother Mary.

On hearing the words of the Qur'ān, the Negus was moved to tears. To the Muslims, he said:

"The message of your Prophet and that of Jesus came from the same source..."

To 'Amr and his companion, he said:

"Go. For, by God, I will never surrender them to you."

That, however, was not the end of the matter. The wily 'Amr made up his mind to go to the King the following day "to mention something about the Muslims' belief which will certainly fill his heart with anger and make him detest them". On the morrow, 'Amr went to the Negus and said:

"O King, these people to whom you have given refuge and whom you protect say something terrible about Jesus the son of Mary - that he is a slave. Send for them and ask them what they say about him."

The Negus summoned the Muslims once more and Ja'far acted as their spokesman. The Negus put the question:

"What do you say about Jesus, the son of Mary?"

"Regarding him, we only say what has been revealed to our Prophet," replied Ja'far.

"And what is that?" enquired the Negus.

"Our Prophet says that Jesus is the Servant of God and His Prophet, His spirit and His word which He cast into Mary the Virgin."

The Negus was obviously excited by this reply and exclaimed:

"By God, Jesus the son of Mary was exactly as your Prophet has described him."

The bishops around the Negus grunted in disgust at what they had heard and were reprimanded by the Negus. He turned to the Muslims and said:

"Go, for you are safe and secure. Whoever obstructs you will pay for it and whoever opposes you will be punished. For, by God, I would rather not have a mountain of gold than that anyone of you should come to any harm."

Turning to 'Amr and his companion, he instructed his attendants:

"Return their gifts to these two men. I have no need of them."

'Amr and his companion left broken and frustrated. The Muslims stayed on in the land of the Negus who

proved to be most generous and kind to his guests.

Ja'far and his wife Asmā' spent about ten years in Abyssinia which became a second home for them. There, Asmā' gave birth to three children whom they named 'Abdullāh, Muḥammad and 'Awn. Their second child was possibly the first child in the history of the Muslim Ummah to be given the name Muḥammad after the noble Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace.

In the seventh year of the hijrah, Ja'far and his family left Abyssinia with a group of Muslims and headed for Madīnah. When they arrived the Prophet was just returning from the successful conquest of Khaybar. He was so overjoyed at meeting Ja'far that he said:

"I do not know what fills me with more happiness, the conquest of Khaybar or the coming of Ja'far."

Muslims in general and the poor among them especially were just as happy with the return of Ja'far as the Prophet was. Ja'far quickly became known as a person who was much concerned for the welfare of the poor and indigent. For this he was nicknamed, the "Father of the Poor". Abū Hurayrah said of him:

"The best of men towards us indigent folk was Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib. He would pass by us on his way home and give us whatever food he had. Even if his own food had run out, he would send us a pot in which he had placed some butterfat and nothing more. We would open it and lick it clean..."

Ja'far's stay in Madīnah was not long. At the beginning of the eighth year of the hijrah, the Prophet mobilized an army to confront Byzantine forces in Syria because one of his emissaries who had gone in peace had been

treacherously killed by a Byzantine governor. He appointed Zayd ibn Ḥārithah as commander of the army and gave the following instructions:

"If Zayd is wounded or killed, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib would take over the command. If Ja'far is killed or wounded, then your commander would be 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah. If 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah is killed, then let the Muslims choose for themselves a commander."

The Prophet had never given such instructions to an army before and the Muslims took this as an indication that he expected the battle to be tough and that they would even suffer major losses.

When the Muslim army reached Mu'tah, a small village situated among hills in Jordan, they discovered that the Byzantines had amassed a hundred thousand men backed up by a massive number of Christian Arabs from the tribes of Lakhm, Judhām, Qudāh and others. The Muslim army only numbered thirty thousand.

Despite the great odds against them, the Muslim forces engaged the Byzantines in battle. Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, the beloved companion of the Prophet, was among the first to fall. Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib then assumed command. Mounted on his ruddy-complexioned horse, he penetrated deep into the Byzantine ranks. As he spurred his horse on, he called out:

"How wonderful is Paradise as it draws near!

How pleasant and cool is its drink!

Punishment for the Byzantines is not far away!"

Ja'far continued to fight vigorously but was eventually slain. The third in command, 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah, also fell. Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, the inveterate fighter who had recently accepted Islam, was then chosen as the

commander. He made a tactical withdrawal, redeployed the Muslims and renewed the attack from several directions. Eventually, the bulk of the Byzantine forces fled in disarray.

The news of the death of his three commanders reached the Prophet in Madīnah. The pain and grief he felt was intense. He went to Ja'far's house and met his wife Asmā'. She was getting ready to receive her absent husband. She had prepared dough and bathed and clothed the children. Asmā' said:

"When the Messenger of God approached us, I saw a veil of sadness shrouding his noble face and I became very apprehensive. But I did not dare ask him about Ja'far for fear that I would hear some unpleasant news. He greeted and asked, 'Where are Ja'far's children?' I called them for him and they came and crowded around him happily, each one wanting to claim him for himself. He leaned over and hugged them while tears flowed from his eyes.

'O Messenger of God,' I asked, 'why do you cry? Have you heard anything about Ja'far and his two companions?'

'Yes,' he replied. 'They have attained martyrdom.'"

The smiles and the laughter vanished from the faces of the little children when they heard their mother crying and wailing. Women came and gathered around Asmā'.

"O Asmā'," said the Prophet, "don't say anything objectionable and don't beat your breast." He then prayed to God to protect and sustain the family of Ja'far and assured them that he had attained Paradise.

The Prophet left Asmā's house and went to his daughter Fāṭimah who was also weeping. To her, he said:

"For such as Ja'far, you can (easily) cry yourself to death. Prepare food for Ja'far's family for today they are beside themselves with grief."

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The news of the death of his three commanders reached the Prophet in Madinah. The pain and grief he felt was intense. He went to Ja'far's house and met his wife Asmā'. She was getting ready to receive her absent husband. She had prepared dough and bathed and clothed the children. Asmā' said:

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"For such as Ja'far, you can (easily) cry yourself to death. Prepare food for Ja'far's family for today they are beside themselves with grief."



5

Abū Sufyān ibn al-Hārith

Rarely can one find a closer bond between two persons such as existed between Muḥammad the son of ‘Abdullāh and Abū Sufyān the son of al-Hārith. (This Abū Sufyān of course was not the same as Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, the powerful Quraysh chieftain.)

Abū Sufyān ibn al-Hārith was born about the same time as the blessed Prophet. They resembled each other a great deal. They grew up together and for a time lived in the same household. Abū Sufyān was a cousin of the Prophet. His father, al-Hārith, was the brother of ‘Abdullāh; both were sons of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.

Abū Sufyān was also a foster-brother of the Prophet. He was for a short time nursed by the lady Ḥalimah who looked after the young Muḥammad in the tough and bracing atmosphere of the desert.

In their childhood and youth, Abū Sufyān and Muḥammad were close and intimate friends. So close were they, that one might naturally have expected Abū Sufyān to have been among the first to respond to the call of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and follow wholeheartedly the religion of truth. But this was not to be, at least not for many, many years.

From the time the Prophet made public his call to Islam and first issued the warning to members of his clan about the dangers of continuing in their existing state of unbelief, injustice and immorality, the fire of envy and hatred erupted in the breast of Abū Sufyān. The bonds of kinship snapped. Where once there was love and friendship, there was now revulsion and hate. Where once there was brotherhood, there was now resistance and opposition.

Abū Sufyān at this time was renowned as one of the best fighters and horsemen of the Quraysh and one of their most accomplished poets. He used both sword and tongue in the battle against the Prophet and his mission. All his energies were mobilized in denouncing Islam and persecuting the Muslims. In whatever battle the Quraysh fought against the Prophet and whatever torture and persecution they meted out to the Muslims, Abū Sufyān had a part to play. He composed and recited verses attacking and vilifying the Prophet.

For twenty years almost this rancour consumed his soul. His three others brothers - Nawfal, Rabi‘āh and ‘Abdullāh, had all accepted Islam but not he.

In the eighth year after the Hijrah, however, shortly before the Islamic liberation of Makkah, Abū Sufyān’s position began to shift, as he explains:

“When the movement of Islam became vigorous and well-established and news spread of the Prophet’s advance to liberate Makkah, the world caved in on me. I felt trapped.

‘Where shall I go?’ I asked myself. ‘And with whom?’

To my wife and children, I said:

‘Get ready to leave Makkah. Muḥammad’s advance is imminent. I shall certainly be killed. I shall be given no

quarter should the Muslims recognize me.'

'Now,' replied my family, 'you must realize that Arabs and non-Arabs have pledged their obedience to Muḥammad and accepted his religion. You are still bent on opposing him whereas you might have been the first to support and help him.'

They continued trying to influence me to re-consider my attitude to Muḥammad's religion and to re-awaken in me affection towards him. Eventually God opened my heart to Islam. I got up and said to my servant, Madhkūr:

'Get ready a camel and a horse for us.'

I took my son Jaf'ar with me and we galloped with great speed towards al-Abwā' between Makkah and Madinah. I had learnt that Muḥammad had camped there. As I approached the place, I covered my face so that no one could recognize and kill me before I could reach the Prophet and announce my acceptance of Islam directly to him.

Slowly, I proceeded on foot while advance groups of Muslims headed towards Makkah. I avoided their path out of fear that one of the Prophet's companions would recognize me. I continued in this fashion until the Prophet on his mount came into my view. Coming out into the open, I went straight up to him and uncovered my face. He looked at me and recognized me. But, he turned his face away. I moved to face him once again. He avoided looking at me and again turned away his face. This happened repeatedly.

I had no doubt - as I stood there facing the Prophet that he would have been pleased with my acceptance of Islam and that his companions would have rejoiced at his happiness. When, however, the Muslims saw the Prophet,

peace be on him, avoiding me, they too looked at me and shunned me. Abū Bakr met me and violently turned away. I looked at 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, my eyes pleading for his compassion, but I found him even more harsh than Abū Bakr. In fact, 'Umar went on to incite one of the Anṣār against me.

'O enemy of God,' lashed out the Anṣāri, 'you are the one who persecuted the Messenger of God, peace be on him, and tortured his companions. You carried your hostility towards the Prophet to the ends of the earth.'

The Anṣāri went on censuring me in a loud voice while other Muslims glared at me in anger. At that point, I saw my uncle, al-'Abbās, and went to him seeking refuge.

'O uncle,' I said. 'I had hoped that the Prophet, peace be on him, would be happy about my acceptance of Islam because of my kinship to him and because of my position of honour among my people. You know what his reaction has been. Speak to him then on my behalf that he may be pleased with me.'

'No, by God,' replied my uncle. 'I shall not speak to him at all after I have seen him turning away from you except if an opportunity presents itself. I do honour the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, and I stand in awe of him.'

'O uncle, to whom then will you abandon me?' I pleaded.

'I do not have anything for you except what you have heard,' he said.

Anxiety and grief took hold of me. I saw 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib soon after and spoke to him about my case. His response was the same as that of my uncle.

I went back to my uncle and said to him:

'O uncle, if you cannot soften the heart of the Prophet towards me, then at least restrain that man from denouncing me and inciting others against me.'

'Describe him to me,' said my uncle. I described the man to him and he said: 'That is Nu'aymān ibn al-Ḥārith an-Najjārī.' He sent for Nu'aymān and said to him:

'O Nu'aymān! Abū Sufyān is the cousin of the Prophet and my nephew. If the Prophet is angry with him today, he will be pleased with him another day. So leave him...' My uncle continued trying to placate Nu'aymān until the latter relented and said:

'I shall not spurn him anymore.'

When the Prophet reached al-Jahfah (about four days' journey from Makkah), I sat down at the door of his tent. My son Ja'far stood beside me. As he was leaving his tent, the Prophet saw me and averted his face. Yet, I did not despair of seeking his pleasure. Whenever he camped at a place, I would sit at his door and my son Ja'far would stand in front of me... I continued in this fashion for some time. But the situation became too much for me and I became depressed. I said to myself:

'By God, either the Prophet, peace be on him, shows he is pleased with me or I shall take my son and go wandering through the land until we die of hunger and thirst.'

When the Prophet came to hear of this, he relented and, on leaving his tent, he looked more gently towards me than before. I so much hoped that he would smile."

Eventually the Prophet relented and told Abū Sufyān, "There is now no blame on you." He entrusted the newcomer to Islam to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib saying:

"Teach your cousin how to perform wuḍū' and about the Sunnah. Then bring him back to me." When 'Alī returned, the Prophet said:

"Tell all the people that the Messenger of God is pleased with Abū Sufyān and that they should be pleased with him."

Abū Sufyān continued:

"The Prophet then entered Makkah and I too entered with his entourage. He went to the Sacred Mosque and I also went, trying my best to remain in his presence and not separate from him on any account..."

Later, at the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Arabs put together an unprecedented force against the Prophet, peace be on him. They were determined to deal a mortal blow to Islam and the Muslims.

The Prophet went out to confront them with a large number of his companions. I went out with him and when I saw the great throngs of *mushrikīn*, I said:

'By God, today, I shall atone for all my past hostility towards the Prophet, peace be on him, and he shall certainly see on my part what pleases God and what pleases him.'

When the two forces met, the pressure of the *mushrikīn* on the Muslims was severe and the Muslims began to lose heart. Some even began to desert and terrible defeat stared us in the face. However, the Prophet stood firm in the thick of battle astride his mule "ash-Shahba" like a towering mountain, wielding his sword and fighting for himself and those around him...

I jumped from my horse and fought beside him. God knows that I desired martyrdom beside the Messenger of

God. My uncle, al-'Abbās, took the reins of the Prophet's mule and stood at his side. I took up my position on the other side. With my right hand I fended off attacks against the Prophet and with my left I held on to my mount.

When the Prophet saw my devastating blows on the enemy, he asked my uncle:

'Who's this?'

'This is your brother and cousin. Abū Sufyān ibn al-Hārith. Be pleased with him. O Messenger of God.'

'I have done so and God has granted forgiveness to him for all the hostility he has directed against me.'

My heart soared with happiness. I kissed his feet in the stirrup and wept. He turned towards me and said:

'My brother! Upon my life! Advance and strike!'

The words of the Prophet spurred me on and we plunged into the positions of the *mushrikīn* until they were routed and fled in every direction."

After Ḥunayn, Abū Sufyān ibn al-Hārith continued to enjoy the good pleasure of the Prophet and the satisfaction of being in his noble company. But he never looked the Prophet directly in the eye nor focused his gaze on his face out of shame and embarrassment for his past hostility toward him.

Abū Sufyān continued to feel intense remorse for the many and dark days he had spent trying to extinguish the light of God and refusing to follow His message. Henceforth, he would spend his days and nights reciting the verses of the Qur'ān, seeking to understand and follow its laws and profit by its admonitions. He shunned the world and its adornments and turned to God with every fibre of his being. Once the Prophet, peace be on him, saw him entering the mosque and asked his wife:

"Do you know who is this, 'Ā'ishah?"

"No, O Messenger of God." she replied.

"It is my cousin. Abū Sufyān ibn al-Hārith. See, he is the first to enter the masjid and the last to leave. His eyes do not leave his shoelace."

When the Prophet, peace be on him, passed away, Abū Sufyān felt intense grief and wept bitterly.

During the caliphate of 'Umar, may God be pleased with him, Abū Sufyān felt his end drawing near. One day people saw him in al-Baqī', the cemetery not far from the Prophet's mosque where many Ṣaḥābah are buried. He was digging and fashioning a grave. They were surprised. Three days later, Abū Sufyān was lying stretched out at home. His family stood around weeping but he said:

"Do not weep for me. By God, I did not commit any wrong since I accepted Islam."

With that, he passed away.



6

Hakim ibn Hizām

History has recorded that he is the only person who was born inside the Ka'bah itself.

Together with a group of friends, his mother had gone inside this ancient House of God to inspect it. On that particular day it was open because of a festive occasion. She was pregnant and labour pains suddenly gripped her. She was unable to leave the Ka'bah. A leather mat was brought to her and she gave birth on it. The child was named Ḥakīm. His father was Ḥizām who was the son of Khuwaylid. Ḥakīm was therefore the nephew of the Lady Khadijah, the daughter of Khuwaylid, may God be pleased with her.

Ḥakīm grew up in a wealthy and noble family which enjoyed a high status in Makkan society. He was also an intelligent and well-mannered person who was well respected by his people. He was held in such esteem that he was given the responsibility of the *rifādah* which involved giving assistance to the needy and those who had lost their property during the season of pilgrimage. He took this responsibility seriously and would even help needy pilgrims from his own resources.

Ḥakīm was a very close friend of the Prophet, peace be

on him, before the latter's call to prophethood. Even though he was five years older than the Prophet, he used to spend much time talking to him and enjoying hours of pleasant companionship. Muḥammad in his turn felt great affection for Ḥakīm.

Their relationship was further strengthened when the Prophet married his aunt, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid.

What is truly amazing is that in spite of the close friendship between Ḥakīm and the Prophet, Ḥakīm did not become a Muslim until the liberation of Makkah, more than twenty years after the start of the Prophet's mission. One would have thought that someone like Ḥakīm, whom God had blessed with a sound intellect and who was so well-disposed to the Prophet, would have been among the first to believe in him and follow the guidance he brought.

But that was not to be.

Just as we are astonished at the late acceptance of Islam on the part of Ḥakīm, he himself later in life was also amazed. In fact, as soon as he accepted Islam and tasted the sweetness of *īmān* (faith), he began to feel deep regret for every moment of his life as a *mushrik* and a denier of God's religion and of His Prophet.

His son once saw him weeping after his acceptance of Islam and asked:

"Why are you weeping, my father?"

"Many things cause me to weep, my dear son. The most grievous is the length of time it took for me to become a Muslim. Acceptance of Islam would have given me so many opportunities to do good which I missed even if I were to have spent the earth in gold. My life was spared at the Battle of Badr and also at the Battle of

Uḥud. After Uḥud, I said to myself that I would not help any Quraysh against Muḥammad, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, and I would not leave Makkah. Then, whenever I felt like accepting Islam I would look at other men among the Quraysh, men of power and maturity who remained firmly attached to the ideas and practices of Jāhiliyah and I would fall in line with them and their neighbours... Oh, how I wish I had not done so. Nothing has destroyed us except the blind following of our forefathers and elders. Why should I not weep, my son?"

The Prophet himself was puzzled. A man of sagacity and understanding like Ḥakīm ibn Hizām - how could Islam remain "hidden" from him? For a long time, the Prophet had dearly hoped that he and a group of persons like him would take the initiative and become Muslims. On the night before the liberation of Makkah, he, may God bless him and grant him peace, said to his companions:

"There are four persons in Makkah whom I consider to be above having any dealing with *shirk* and I would dearly like them to accept Islam."

"Who are they, O Messenger of God?" asked the companions.

"Attāb ibn Usayd, Jubayr ibn Muṭ'im, Ḥakīm ibn Hizām and Suhayl ibn 'Amr," replied the Prophet.

By the grace of God, they all became Muslims.

When the Prophet, peace be on him, entered Makkah to liberate the city from polytheism and the ways of ignorance and immorality, he ordered his herald to proclaim:

"Whoever declares that there is no god but Allāh alone,

that He has no partner and that Muḥammad is His Servant and His Messenger, he is safe..

Whoever sits at the Ka'bah and lays down his weapons, he is safe.

Whoever enters the house of Abū Sufyān, he is safe.

Whoever enters the house of Ḥakīm ibn Hizām, he is safe..."

The house of Abū Sufyān was in the higher part of Makkah and that of Ḥakīm was in the lower part of the city. By proclaiming these houses as places of sanctuary, the Prophet wisely accorded recognition to both Abū Sufyān and Ḥakīm, weakening any thought they might have of resisting and making it easier for them to be more favourably disposed to him and his mission.

Ḥakīm embraced Islam wholeheartedly. He vowed to himself that he would atone for whatever he had done during his *Jāhili* days and that whatever amounts he had spent in opposing the Prophet, he would spend the same amounts in the cause of Islam.

He owned the Dār an-Nadwah, an important and historic building in Makkah, where the Quraysh held their conferences during the days of Jāhiliyah. In this building the Quraysh leaders and chieftains would gather to plot against the Prophet.

Ḥakīm decided to get rid of it and cut himself off from its past associations which were now so painful to him. He sold the building for one hundred thousand dirhams. A Quraysh youth exclaimed to him:

"You have sold something of great historical value and pride to the Quraysh, uncle."

"Come now, my son," replied Ḥakīm. "All vain pride and glory has now gone and all that remains of value is

Uḥud. After Uḥud, I said to myself that I would not help any Quraysh against Muḥammad, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, and I would not leave Makkah. Then, whenever I felt like accepting Islam I would look at other men among the Quraysh, men of power and maturity who remained firmly attached to the ideas and practices of Jāhiliyah and I would fall in line with them and their neighbours... Oh, how I wish I had not done so. Nothing has destroyed us except the blind following of our forefathers and elders. Why should I not weep, my son?"

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"You have sold something of great historical value and pride to the Quraysh, uncle."

"Come now, my son," replied Ḥakīm. "All vain pride and glory has now gone and all that remains of value is

taqwā - consciousness of God. I have only sold the building in order to acquire a house in Paradise. I swear to you that I have given the proceeds from it to be spent in the path of God Almighty."

Ḥakīm ibn Hizām performed the Ḥajj after becoming a Muslim. He took with him one hundred fine camels and sacrificed them all in order to achieve nearness to God. In the following Ḥajj, he stood on 'Arafāt. With him were one hundred slaves. To each he gave a pendant of silver on which was engraved: "Free for the sake of God Almighty from Ḥakīm ibn Hizām." On a third Ḥajj, he took with him a thousand sheep and sacrificed them all at Mina to feed the poor Muslims in order to attain nearness to God.

While Ḥakīm was generous in his spending for the sake of God, he also still liked to have much. After the Battle of Hunayn, he asked the Prophet for some of the booty which the Prophet gave. He then asked for more and the Prophet gave him more. Ḥakīm was still a newcomer to Islam and the Prophet was more generous to newcomers so as to reconcile their hearts to Islam. Ḥakīm ended up with a large share of the booty. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him:

"O Ḥakīm! This wealth is indeed sweet and attractive. Whoever takes it and is satisfied will be blessed by it and whoever takes out of greed will not be blessed. He would be like someone who eats and is not satisfied. The upper hand is better than the lower hand (it is better to give than to receive)."

The kind words of advice had a deep and immediate effect on Ḥakīm. He was mortified and said to the Prophet:

"O Messenger of God! By Him Who has sent you with

the truth, I shall not ask anyone after you for anything."

During the caliphate of Abū Bakr, Ḥakīm was called several times to collect his stipend from the *Bayt al-māl* but he refused to take any money. He did the same during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb whereupon 'Umar addressed the Muslims:

"I testify to you, O Muslims, that I have called Ḥakīm to collect his stipend but he refuses."

Ḥakīm remained faithful to his word. He did not take anything from anyone until he passed away. From the Prophet, he had learnt the great truth that contentment is riches beyond compare.



7

Suhayl ibn 'Amr

At the Battle of Badr, when Suhayl fell into the hands of the Muslims as a prisoner, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb came up to the Prophet and said:

"Messenger of God! Let me pull out the two middle incisors of Suhayl ibn 'Amr so that he would not stand up and be able to speak out against you after this day."

"Certainly not, 'Umar," cautioned the Prophet. "I would not mutilate anyone lest God mutilate me even though I am a Prophet." And calling 'Umar closer to him, the blessed Prophet said:

"'Umar, perhaps Suhayl will do something in the future which will please you."

Suhayl ibn 'Amr was a prominent person among the Quraysh. He was clever and articulate and his opinion carried weight among his people. He was known as the *khaṭīb* or spokesman and orator of the Quraysh. He was to play a major role in concluding the famous truce of Ḥudaybiyah.

Towards the end of the sixth year after the Hijrah, the Prophet and about fifteen hundred of his Ṣaḥābah left Madīnah for Makkah to perform 'umrah. To make it known that they were coming in peace, the Muslims were

not armed for battle and carried only their travellers' swords. They also took with them animals for sacrifice to let it be known that they were really coming on pilgrimage.

The Quraysh learnt of their approach and immediately prepared to do battle with them. They vowed to themselves that they would never allow the Muslims to enter Makkah. Khālid ibn al-Walid was despatched at the head of a Quraysh cavalry force to cut off the approaching Muslims. Khālid's army stood waiting for them at a place called Karā' al-Ghamim.

The Prophet learnt in advance of Khālid's position. Although committed to the struggle against them, he was keen not to have any encounter then with the Quraysh forces. He asked:

"Is there any man who could take us (to Makkah) on a different route to avoid the Quraysh?"

A man from the Aslam tribe said he could and took the Muslims through the difficult terrain of War'ah and then on fairly easy marches, finally approaching Makkah from the south. Khālid realized what the Muslims had done and returned frustrated to Makkah.

The Prophet camped near Ḥudaybiyah and indicated that if the Quraysh would give any hint of a truce out of veneration for the sacred time and place, he would respond. The Quraysh sent Badīl ibn Warqā' with a group of men from the Khuzā'ah tribe to find out why the Muslims had come. Badīl met the Prophet and when he returned to the Quraysh and informed them of the peaceful intentions of the Prophet and his companions, they did not believe him because they said he was from the Khuzā'ah who were allies of Muḥammad. "Does Muḥammad intend," they asked, "to come upon us with

his soldiers (in the guise of) performing 'umrah? The Arabs would hear that he moved against us and entered Makkah by force while a state of war existed between us. By God this will never happen with our approval."

The Quraysh then sent Ḥulays ibn 'Alqamah, the chieftain of the Aḥābīsh who were allies of the Quraysh. When the Prophet, peace be on him, saw Ḥulays he said, "This man is from a people who think greatly of animal sacrifice. Drive the sacrificial animals in full view of him so that he can see them. This was done and Ḥulays was greeted by the Muslims chanting the *talbīyah*: "*Labbayk Allāhumma Labbayk*." On his return, Ḥulays exclaimed:

"*Subḥanāllāh* - Glory be to God. These people should not be prevented from entering Makkah. Can lepers and donkeys perform the Ḥajj while the son of al-Muṭṭalib (Muḥammad) be prevented from (visiting) the House of God? By the Lord of the Ka'bah, may the Quraysh be destroyed. These people have come to perform 'umrah."

When the Quraysh heard these words, they scoffed at him:

"Sit down! You are only a nomad Arab. You have no knowledge of plots and intrigues."

'Urwah ibn Mas'ūd, the Thaqaḥī chieftain from Ṭā'if, was then sent out to assess the situation.

He said to the Prophet:

"O Muḥammad! You have gathered all these people and have come back to your birthplace. The Quraysh have come out and pledged to God that you would not enter Makkah against them by force. By God, all these people might well desert you." At that Abū Bakr went up to 'Urwah and said with disdain:

"We desert him (Muḥammad)? Woe to you."

As 'Urwah was speaking, he touched the Prophet's beard and al-Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah rapped his hand saying:

"Take away your hand," and 'Urwah retorted:

"Woe to you! How crude and coarse you are."

The Prophet smiled. "Who is this man, O Muḥammad?" asked 'Urwah.

"This is your cousin, Al-Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah."

"What perfidy!" 'Urwah hissed at al-Mughīrah and continued to insult him.

'Urwah then surveyed the companions of the Prophet. He saw that whenever he gave them an order, they hastened to carry it out. When he made ablutions they vied with one another to help him. When they spoke in his presence, they lowered their voices and did not look him in the eye out of respect for him.

Back with the Quraysh, 'Urwah showed that he was obviously impressed:

"By God, O people of the Quraysh, I have been to Chosroes in his kingdom and I have seen Caesar the Byzantine emperor in the plenitude of his power, but never have I seen a king among his people like Muḥammad among his companions. I have seen a people who would not abandon him for anything. Reconsider your position. He is presenting you with right guidance. Accept what he has presented to you. I advise you sincerely... I fear that you will never gain victory over him."

"Don't speak like that," said the Quraysh. "We will have him go back this year and he can return in the future."

Meanwhile, the Prophet summoned 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān

and sent him to the Quraysh leaders to inform them of his purpose in coming to Makkah and to ask their permission for the Muslims to visit their relatives. 'Uthmān was also to cheer up the *mustaḍ'afīn* among the Muslims who still lived in Makkah and inform them that liberation would not be long in coming..

'Uthmān delivered the Prophet's message to the Quraysh and they repeated their determination not to allow the Prophet to enter Makkah. They suggested that 'Uthmān could make *ṭawāf* around the Ka'bah but he replied that he would not make *ṭawāf* while the Messenger of God was prevented from doing so. They then took 'Uthmān into custody and a rumour spread that he was killed. When the Prophet heard this, his attitude changed.

"We shall not depart," he said, "until we fight." He summoned the Muslims to take *bay'ah*, an oath of allegiance, to fight. The herald cried out:

"O people, *al-bay'ah*, *al-bay'ah*."

They flocked to the Prophet as he sat under a tree and swore allegiance to him that they would fight. Soon after, however, the Prophet ascertained that the rumour was false.

It was at this point that the Quraysh sent Suhayl ibn 'Amr to the Messenger of God with the brief to negotiate and persuade the Prophet to return to Madīnah without entering Makkah. Suhayl was chosen no doubt because of his persuasiveness, his toughness and his alertness - major qualities of a good negotiator. When the Prophet saw Suhayl approaching, he immediately guessed the change in the position of the Quraysh.

"The people want reconciliation. That's why they have sent this man."

The talks between the Prophet and Suhayl continued for long until finally agreement was reached in principle. 'Umar and others were very upset with the terms of the agreement which they considered to be harmful to the cause of Islam and a defeat for the Muslims. The Prophet assured them that this was not the case and that he would never go against the command of God and that God would not neglect him. He then called 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to write down the terms of the treaty:

"Write: *Bismillāhi-r Rahmāni-r Raḥīm*."

"I don't know this (phrase)", interjected Suhayl. "Write instead '*Bismika Allāhumma* - In Your name, O Allāh'."

The Prophet conceded and instructed 'Alī to write '*Bismika Allāhumma*'. He then said: "Write: 'This is what has been agreed between Muḥammad the Messenger of God and Suhayl ibn 'Amr...'"

Suhayl objected: "If I had testified that you were indeed the Messenger of God, I would not be fighting you. Write instead your name and the name of your father." So the Prophet again conceded this and instructed 'Alī to write: 'This is what has been agreed upon by Muḥammad the son of 'Abdullāh and Suhayl ibn 'Amr. They have agreed to suspend war for ten years in which people would enjoy security and would refrain from (harming) one another. Also, that whoever from among the Quraysh should come to Muḥammad without the permission of his *walī* (legal guardian), Muḥammad would send him back to them and that if any who is with Muḥammad should come to the Quraysh, they would not send him back to him.'

Suhayl had managed to save the Makkans' face. He had attempted to and got as much as possible for the Quraysh in the negotiations. Of course he was assisted in

this by the noble tolerance of the Prophet.

Two years of the Ḥudaybiyah treaty elapsed during which the Muslims enjoyed a respite from the Quraysh and were free to concentrate on other matters. In the eighth year after the Hijrah however the Quraysh broke the terms of the treaty by supporting the Banū Bakr in a bloody aggression against the Khuza'ah who had chosen to be allies of the Prophet.

The Prophet took the opportunity to march on Makkah but his object was not revenge. Ten thousand Muslims converged on Makkah reaching there in the month of Ramaḍān. The Quraysh realized that there was no hope of resisting let alone of defeating the Muslim forces. They were completely at the mercy of the Prophet. What was to be their fate, they who had harried and persecuted the Muslims, tortured and boycotted them, driven them out of their hearths and homes, stirred up others against them, made war on them?

The city surrendered to the Prophet. He received the leaders of the Quraysh in a spirit of tolerance and magnanimity. In a voice full of compassion and tenderness he asked:

"O people of the Quraysh! What do you think I will do with you?"

Thereupon, the adversary of Islam of yesterday, Suhayl ibn 'Amr, replied:

"We think (you will treat us) well, noble brother, son of a noble brother."

A radiant smile flashed across the lips of the beloved of God as he said:

"*Idhhabū... wa antum at-ṭulaqā'*. Go, for you are free."

At this moment of unsurpassed compassion, nobility

and greatness, all the emotions of Suhayl ibn 'Amr were shaken and he announced his Islam or submission to God, the Lord of all the worlds. His acceptance of Islam at that particular time was not the Islam of a defeated man passively giving himself up to his fate. It was instead, as his later life was to demonstrate, the Islam of a man whom the greatness of Muḥammad and the greatness of the religion he proclaimed had captivated.

Those who became Muslims on the day Makkah was liberated were given the name "*Aṭ-Ṭulaqā'*" or the free ones. They realized how fortunate they were and many dedicated themselves in sincere worship and sacrifice to the service of the religion which they had resisted for years. Among the most prominent of these was Suhayl ibn 'Amr.

Islam moulded him anew. All his earlier talents were now burnished to a fine excellence. To these he added new talents and placed them all in the service of truth, goodness and faith. The qualities and practices for which he became known can be described in a few words: kindness, generosity, frequent Ṣalāt, fasting, recitation of the Qur'ān, weeping for the fear of God. This was the greatness of Suhayl. In spite of his late acceptance of Islam, he was transformed into a selfless worshipper and a fighting *fidā'ī* in the path of God.

When the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, passed away, the news quickly reached Makkah, where Suhayl was still resident. The Muslims were plunged into a state of confusion and dismay just as in Madīnah. In Madīnah, Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with him, quelled the confusion with his decisive words:

"Whoever worships Muḥammad, Muḥammad is dead.

And whoever worships God, God is indeed Living and will never die."

In Makkah Suhayl performed the same role in dispelling the vain ideas some Muslims may have had and directing them to the eternal truths of Islam. He called the Muslims together and in his brilliant and salutary style, he affirmed to them that Muḥammad was indeed the Messenger of God and that he did not die until he had discharged his trust and propagated the message and that it was the duty of all believers after his death to apply themselves assiduously to following his example and way of life.

On this day more than others, the prophetic words of the Messenger shone forth. Did not the Prophet say to 'Umar when the latter sought permission to pull out Suhayl's teeth at Badr:

"Leave them, for one day perhaps they would bring you joy"?

When the news of Suhayl's stand in Makkah reached the Muslims of Madīnah and they heard of his persuasive speech strengthening the faith in the hearts of the believers, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb remembered the words of the Prophet. The day had come when Islam benefitted from the two middle incisors of Suhayl which 'Umar had wanted to pull out.

When Suhayl became a Muslim he made a vow to himself which could be summarized in these words: to exert himself and spend in the cause of Islam at least in the same measure as he had done for the *mushrikīn*. With the *mushrikīn*, he had spent long hours before their idols. Now he stood for long periods with the believers in the presence of the one and only God, praying and fasting.

Before he had stood by the *mushrikīn* and participated

in many acts of aggression and war against Islam. Now he took his place in the ranks of the Muslim army, fighting courageously, pitting himself against the fire of Persia and the injustice and oppression of the Byzantine empire.

In this spirit he left for Syria with the Muslim armies and participated in the Battle of Yarmūk against the Byzantines, a battle that was singularly ferocious in its intensity.

Suhayl was someone who loved his birthplace dearly. In spite of that, he refused to return to Makkah after the victory of the Muslims in Syria. He said:

"I heard the Messenger of God, peace be on him, say: 'The going forth of anyone of you in the path of God for an hour is better for him than his life's works in his household.'" And so he vowed: "I shall be a *murābiṭ* in the path of God till I die and I shall not return to Makkah."

For the rest of his life, Suhayl remained true to his pledge. He died in Palestine in the small village of 'Amawās near Jerusalem.



8

Zayd ibn Thābit

We are in the second year of the Hijrah. Madīnah the city of the Prophet is buzzing with activity as the Muslims prepare for the long march southwards to Badr.

The noble Prophet made a final inspection of the first army to be mobilized under his leadership to wage jihād against those who had tormented the Muslims for many years and who were still bent on putting an end to his mission.

A youth, not yet thirteen, walked up to the ranks. He was confident and alert. He held a sword which was as long or possibly slightly longer than his own height. He went up to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and said:

"I dedicate myself to you, Messenger of God. Permit me to be with you and to fight the enemies of God under your banner."

The noble Prophet looked at him with admiration and patted his shoulder with loving tenderness. He commended him for his courage but refused to enlist him because he was still too young.

The youth, Zayd ibn Thābit, turned and walked away, dejected and sad. As he walked, in slow and measured

paces, he stuck his sword in the ground as a sign of his disappointment. He was denied the honour of accompanying the Prophet on his first campaign. Behind him was his mother, an-Nawār bint Mālik. She felt equally dejected and sad. She had dearly wished to see her young son go with the army of *mujāhidīn* and to be with the Prophet at this most critical time.

One year later, as preparations were underway for the second encounter with the Quraysh which took place at Uhud, a group of Muslim teenagers bearing arms of various kinds - swords, spears, bows and arrows and shields - approached the Prophet. They were seeking to be enlisted in any capacity in the Muslim ranks. Some of them, like Rāfi' ibn Khadij and Samurah ibn Jundub, who were strong and well-built for their age and who demonstrated their ability to wrestle and handle weapons, were granted permission by the Prophet to join the Muslim forces. Others like 'Abdullāh the son of 'Umar and Zayd ibn Thābit were still considered by the Prophet to be too young and immature to fight. He promised though to consider them for a later campaign. It was only at the Battle of the Trench when Zayd was about sixteen years old that he was at last allowed to bear arms in defence of the Muslim community.

Although Zayd was keen to participate in battles, it is not as a warrior that he is remembered. After his rejection for the Badr campaign, he accepted the fact then that he was too young to fight in major battles. His alert mind turned to other fields of service, which had no connection with age and which could bring him closer to the Prophet, peace be on him. He considered the field of knowledge and in particular of memorizing the Qur'ān. He mentioned

the idea to his mother. She was delighted and immediately made attempts to have his ambition realized. An-Nuwar spoke to some men of the Anṣār about the youth's desire and they in turn broached the matter with the Prophet, saying:

"O Messenger of God, our son Zayd ibn Thābit has memorized seventeen sūrahs of the Book of God and recites them as correctly as they were revealed to you. In addition to that he is good at reading and writing. It is in this field of service that he desires to be close to you. Listen to him if you will."

The Prophet, peace be on him, listened to Zayd reciting some sūrahs he had memorized. His recitation was clear and beautiful and his stops and pauses indicated clearly that he understood well what he recited. The Prophet was pleased. Indeed he found that Zayd's ability exceeded the commendation he had been given by his relatives. The Prophet then set him a task which required intelligence, skill and persistence.

"Zayd, learn the writing of the Jews for me," instructed the Prophet.

"At your command, Messenger of God," replied Zayd who set about learning Hebrew with enthusiasm. He became quite proficient in the language and wrote it for the Prophet when he wanted to communicate with the Jews. Zayd also read and translated from Hebrew when the Jews wrote to the Prophet. The Prophet instructed him to learn Syriac also and this he did. Zayd thus came to perform the important function of an interpreter for the Prophet in his dealings with non-Arabic speaking peoples.

Zayd's enthusiasm and skill were obvious. When the Prophet felt confident of his faithfulness in the discharge

of duties and the care, precision and understanding with which he carried out tasks, he entrusted Zayd with the weighty responsibility of recording the Divine revelation.

When any part of the Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet, he often sent for Zayd and instructed him to bring the writing materials, "the parchment, the ink-pot and the scapula", and write the revelation.

Zayd was not the only one who acted as a scribe for the Prophet. One source has listed forty-eight persons who used to write for him. Zayd was very prominent among them. He did not only write but during the Prophet's time he collected portions of the Qur'ān that were written down by others and arranged these under the supervision of the Prophet. He is reported to have said:

"We used to compile the Qur'ān from small manuscripts in the presence of the Prophet."

In this way, Zayd experienced the Qur'ān directly from the Prophet himself. It could be said that he grew up with the verses of the Qur'ān, understanding well the circumstances surrounding each revelation. He thus became well-versed in the secrets of the Shari'ah and at an early age gained the well-deserved reputation as a leading scholar among the companions of the Prophet.

After the death of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, the task fell on this fortunate young man who specialized in the Qur'ān to authenticate the first and most important reference for the *ummah* of Muḥammad. This became an urgent task after the wars of apostasy and the Battle of Yamāmah in particular in which a large number of those who had committed the Qur'ān to memory perished.

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'Umar convinced the Khalifah Abū Bakr that unless the Qur'ān was collected in one manuscript, a large part of it was in danger of being lost. Abū Bakr summoned Zayd ibn Thābit and said to him:

"You are an intelligent young man and we do not suspect you (of telling lies or of forgetfulness) and you used to write the Divine revelation for God's Messenger. Therefore look for (all parts of) the Qur'ān and collect it in one manuscript."

Zayd was immediately aware of the weighty responsibility. He later said:

"By God, if he (Abū Bakr) had ordered me to shift one of the mountains from its place, it would not have been harder for me than what he had ordered me concerning the collection of the Qur'ān."

Zayd finally accepted the task and, according to him, "started locating the Qur'anic material and collecting it from parchments, scapula, leafstalks of date palms and from the memories of men (who knew it by heart)".

It was a painstaking task and Zayd was careful that not a single error, however slight or unintentional, should creep into the work. When Zayd had completed his task, he left the prepared *ṣuḥuf* or sheets with Abū Bakr. Before he died, Abū Bakr left the *ṣuḥuf* with 'Umar who in turn left it with his daughter Ḥafṣah. Ḥafṣah, Umm Salamah and 'Ā'ishah were wives of the Prophet, may Allāh be pleased with them, who memorized the Qur'ān.

During the time of 'Uthmān, by which time Islam had spread far and wide, differences in reading the Qur'ān became obvious. A group of companions of the Prophet, headed by Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, who was then stationed in 'Irāq, came to 'Uthmān and urged him to

"save the Muslim *ummah* before they differ about the Qur'ān".

'Uthmān obtained the manuscript of the Qur'ān from Ḥafṣah and again summoned the leading authority, Zayd ibn Thābit, and some other competent companions to make accurate copies of it. Zayd was put in charge of the operation. He completed the task with the same meticulousness with which he compiled the original *ṣuḥuf* during the time of Abū Bakr.

Zayd and his assistants wrote many copies. One of these 'Uthmān sent to every Muslim province with the order that all other Qur'anic materials whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies be burnt. This was important in order to eliminate any variations or differences from the standard text of the Qur'ān. 'Uthmān kept a copy for himself and returned the original manuscript to Ḥafṣah.

Zayd ibn Thābit thus became one of the foremost authorities on the Qur'ān. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb once addressed the Muslims and said:

"O people, whoever wants to ask about the Qur'ān, let him go to Zayd ibn Thābit."

And so it was that seekers of knowledge from among the companions of the Prophet and the generation who succeeded them, known as the *Tābi'ūn*, came from far and wide to benefit from his knowledge. When Zayd died, Abū Hurayrah said:

"Today, the scholar of this *ummah* has died."

When a Muslim holds the Qur'ān and reads it or hears it being recited, *sūrah* after *sūrah*, *āyah* after *āyah*, he should know that he owes a tremendous debt of gratitude and recognition to a truly great companion of the Prophet,

Zayd ibn Thābit, for helping to preserve for all time to come the Book of Eternal Wisdom. Truly did God, the Blessed and Exalted, say:

“Surely We have revealed the Book of Remembrance and We shall certainly preserve it.” (*The Qur’ān*, Sūrah al-Hijr, 15: 9).



9

‘Abdūllah ibn ‘Abbās

‘Abdullāh was the son of ‘Abbās, an uncle of the noble Prophet. He was born just three years before the Hijrah. When the Prophet died, ‘Abdullāh was thus only thirteen years old.

When he was born, his mother took him to the blessed Prophet who put some of his saliva on the babe’s tongue even before he began to suckle. This was the beginning of the close and intimate tie between ‘Abbās and the Prophet that was to be part of a life-long love and devotion.

When ‘Abdullāh reached the age of discretion, he attached himself to the service of the Prophet. He would run to fetch water for him when he wanted to make wuḍū’. During Ṣalāt, he would stand behind the Prophet in prayer and when the Prophet went on journeys or expeditions, he would follow next in line to him. ‘Abdullāh thus became like the shadow of the Prophet, constantly in his company.

In all these situations he was attentive and alert to whatever the Prophet did and said. His heart was enthusiastic and his young mind was pure and uncluttered, committing the Prophet’s words to memory with the capacity and accuracy of a recording instrument. In this

way and through his constant researches later, as we shall see, 'Abdullāh became one of the most learned companions of the Prophet, preserving on behalf of later generations of Muslims, the priceless words of the Messenger of God. It is said that he committed to memory about one thousand, six hundred and sixty sayings of the Prophet which are recorded and authenticated in the collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

The Prophet would often draw 'Abdullāh as a child close to him, pat him on the shoulder and pray:

"O Lord, make him acquire a deep understanding of the religion of Islam and instruct him in the meaning and interpretation of things."

There were many occasions thereafter when the blessed Prophet would repeat this *du'ā'* or prayer for his cousin and before long 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās realized that his life was to be devoted to the pursuit of learning and knowledge.

The Prophet moreover prayed that he be granted not just knowledge and understanding but wisdom. 'Abdullāh related the following incident about himself:

"Once the Prophet, peace be upon him, was on the point of performing wuḍū'. I hurried to get water ready for him. He was pleased with what I was doing. As he was about to begin Ṣalāt, he indicated that I should stand at his side. However, I stood behind him. When the Ṣalāt was finished, he turned to me and said:

'What prevented you from being at my side, O 'Abdullāh?'

'You are too illustrious and too great in my eyes for me to stand side by side with you,' I replied.

Raising his hands to the heavens, the Prophet then

prayed:

'O Lord, grant him wisdom.'"

The Prophet's prayer undoubtedly was granted for the young 'Abdullāh was to prove time and again that he possessed a wisdom beyond his years. But it was a wisdom that came only with devotion and the dogged pursuit of knowledge both during the Prophet's lifetime and after his death.

During the lifetime of the Prophet, 'Abdullāh would not miss any of his assemblies and he would commit to memory whatever he said. After the Prophet passed away, he would take care to go to as many companions as possible especially those who knew the Prophet longer and learn from them what the Prophet had taught them. Whenever he heard that someone knew a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet which he did not know he would go quickly to him and record it. He would subject whatever he heard to close scrutiny and check it against other reports. He would go to as many as thirty companions to verify a single matter.

'Abdullāh described what he once did on hearing that a companion of the Prophet knew a *ḥadīth* unknown to him:

"I went to him during the time of the afternoon siesta and spread my cloak in front of his door. The wind blew dust on me (as I sat waiting for him). If I wished I could have sought his permission to enter and he would certainly have given me permission. But I preferred to wait on him so that he could be completely refreshed. Coming out of his house and seeing me in that condition he said:

'O cousin of the Prophet! What's the matter with you? If you had sent for me I would have come to you.'

'I am the one who should come to you, for knowledge is sought, it does not just come,' I said. I asked him about the *ḥadīth* and learnt from him."

In this way, the dedicated 'Abdullāh would ask, and ask, and go on asking. And he would sift and scrutinize the information he had collected with his keen and meticulous mind.

It was not only in the collection of *ḥadīth* that 'Abdullāh specialized. He devoted himself to acquiring knowledge in a wide variety of fields. He had a special admiration for persons like Zayd ibn Thābit, the recorder of the revelation, the leading judge and jurisconsult in Madīnah, an expert in the laws of inheritance and in reading the Qur'ān. When Zayd intended to go on a trip, the young 'Abdullāh would stand humbly at his side and taking hold of the reins of his mount would adopt the attitude of a humble servant in the presence of his master. Zayd would say to him:

"Don't, O cousin of the Prophet."

"Thus we were commanded to treat the learned ones among us," 'Abdullāh would say.

"And Zayd would say to him in turn:

"Let me see your hand." 'Abdullāh would stretch out his hand. Zayd, taking it, would kiss it and say:

"Thus we were commanded to treat the *ahl al-bayt* - members of the household of the Prophet."

As 'Abdullāh's knowledge grew, he grew in stature. Masrūq ibn al-Ajda said of him:

"Whenever I saw Ibn 'Abbās, I would say: He is the most handsome of men. When he spoke, I would say: He is the most eloquent of men. And when he held a conversation, I would say: He is the most knowledgeable

of men."

The Khalifah 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb often sought his advice on important matters of state and described him as "the young man of maturity".

Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ described him with these words:

"I have never seen someone who was quicker in understanding, who had more knowledge and greater wisdom than Ibn 'Abbās. I have seen 'Umar summon him to discuss difficult problems in the presence of veterans of Badr from among the Muhājirīn and Anṣār. Ibn 'Abbās would speak and 'Umar would not disregard what he had to say."

It is these qualities which resulted in 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās being known as "the learned man of this Ummah".

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās was not content to accumulate knowledge. He felt he had a duty to the *ummah* to educate those in search of knowledge and the general masses of the Muslim community. He turned to teaching and his house became a university - yes, a university in the full sense of the word, a university with specialized teaching but with the difference that there was only one teacher - 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās.

There was an enthusiastic response to 'Abdullāh's classes. One of his companions described a typical scene in front of his house:

"I saw people converging on the roads leading to his house until there was hardly any room in front of his house. I went in and told him about the crowds of people at his door and he said:

'Get me water for wuḍū'.'

He performed wuḍū' and, seating himself, said:

'Go out and say to them: Whoever wants to ask about

the Qur'ān and its letters (pronunciation) let him enter.'

This I did and people entered until the house was filled. Whatever he was asked, 'Abdullāh was able to elucidate and even provide additional information to what was asked. Then (to his students) he said:

'Make way for your brothers.'

Then to me he said: 'Go out and say: Who wants to ask about the Qur'ān and its interpretation, let him enter.'

Again the house was filled and 'Abdullāh elucidated and provided more information than what was requested."

And so it continued with groups of people coming in to discuss *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (the lawful and the prohibited in Islam), inheritance laws, Arabic language, poetry and etymology.

To avoid congestion with many groups of people coming to discuss various subjects on a single day, 'Abdullāh decided to devote one day exclusively for a particular discipline. On one day, only the exegesis of the Qur'ān would be taught while on another day only *fiqh* (jurisprudence). The *maghāzī* or campaigns of the Prophet, poetry, Arab history before Islam were each allocated a special day.

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās brought to his teaching a powerful memory and a formidable intellect. His explanations were precise, clear and logical. His arguments were persuasive and supported by pertinent textual evidence and historical facts.

One occasion when his formidable powers of persuasion used was during the caliphate of 'Alī. A large number of supporters of 'Alī in his stand against Mu'āwiyah had just deserted him. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās went to 'Alī and requested permission to speak to them. 'Alī hesitated

fearing that 'Abdullāh would be in danger at their hands but eventually gave way on 'Abdullāh's optimism that nothing untoward would happen.

'Abdullāh went over to the group. They were absorbed in worship. Some were not willing to let him speak but others were prepared to give him a hearing.

"Tell me," asked 'Abdullāh, "what grievances have you against the cousin of the Prophet, the husband of his daughter and the first of those who believed in him?"

The men proceeded to relate three main complaints against 'Alī. First, that he appointed men to pass judgment in matters pertaining to the religion of God - meaning that 'Alī had agreed to accept the arbitration of Abū Mūsā al-'Ash'arī and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ in the dispute with Mu'āwiyah. Secondly, that he fought and did not take booty or prisoners of war. Thirdly, that he did not insist on the title of Amīr al-Mu'minīn during the arbitration process although the Muslims had pledged allegiance to him and he was their legitimate amīr. To them this was obviously a sign of weakness and a sign that 'Alī was prepared to bring his legitimate position as Amīr al-Mu'minīn into disrepute.

In reply, 'Abdullāh asked them that should he cite verses from the Qur'ān and sayings of the Prophet to which they had no objection and which related to their criticisms, would they be prepared to change their position. They replied that they would and 'Abdullāh proceeded:

"Regarding your statement that 'Alī has appointed men to pass judgment in matters pertaining to God's religion, God Glorified and Exalted is He, says: 'O you who believe! Kill not game while you are in the state of pilgrimage. If any of you do so intentionally, the

compensation is an offering of a domestic animal equivalent to the one he killed, with two persons of probity among you giving their judgement thereon..."

"I adjure you, by God! Is the adjudication by men in matters pertaining to the preservation of their blood and their lives and making peace between them more deserving of attention than adjudication over a rabbit whose value is only a quarter of a dirham?"

Their reply was of course that arbitration was more important in the case of preserving Muslim lives and making peace among them than over the killing of game in the sacred precincts for which Allāh sanctioned arbitration by men.

"Have we then finished with this point?" asked 'Abdullāh and their reply was:

"*Allāhumma, na'am* - O Lord, yes!"

'Abdullāh went on:

"As for your statement that 'Alī fought and did not take prisoners of war as the Prophet did, do you really desire to take your "mother" 'Ā'ishah as a captive and treat her as fair game in the way that captives are treated? If your answer is "Yes", then you have fallen into *kufṛ* (disbelief). And if you say that she is not your "mother", you would also have fallen into a state of *kufṛ* for God, Glorified and Exalted is He, has said:

'The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves and his wives are their mothers (entitled to respect and consideration).' (*The Qur'ān*, Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33: 6).

"Choose for yourself what you want," said 'Abdullāh and then he asked:

"Have we then finished with this point?" and this time

too their reply was:

"*Allāhumma, na'am* - O Lord, yes!"

'Abdullāh went on:

"As for your statement that 'Alī has surrendered the title of Amīr al-Mu'minīn, (remember) that the Prophet himself, peace and blessings of God be on him, at the time of Ḥudaybiyah, demanded that the *mushrikīn* write in the truce which he concluded with them: 'This is what the Messenger of God has agreed...' and they retorted: 'If we believed that you were the Messenger of God we would not have blocked your way to the Ka'bah nor would we have fought you. Write instead: 'Muḥammad the son of 'Abdullāh.' The Prophet conceded their demand while saying: 'By God, I am the Messenger of God even if they reject me.'"

At this point 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās asked the dissidents:

"Have we then finished with this point?" and their reply was once again:

"*Allāhumma, na'am* - O Lord, yes!"

One of the fruits of this verbal challenge in which 'Abdullāh displayed his intimate knowledge of the Qur'ān and the *sīrah* of the Prophet as well as his remarkable powers of argument and persuasion, was that the majority, about twenty thousand men, returned to the ranks of 'Alī. About four thousand however remained obdurate. These latter came to be known as Kharijites.

On this and other occasions, the courageous 'Abdullāh showed that he preferred peace above war, and logic against force and violence. However, he was not only known for his courage, his perceptive thought and his vast knowledge. He was also known for his great generosity and hospitality. Some of his contemporaries

said of his household:

“We have not seen a house which has more food or drink or fruit or knowledge than the house of Ibn ‘Abbās.”

He had a genuine and abiding concern for people. He was thoughtful and caring. He once said:

“When I realize the importance of a verse of God’s Book, I would wish that all people should know what I know.

“When I hear of a Muslim ruler who deals equitably and rules justly, I am happy on his account and I pray for him...

“When I hear of rains which fall on the land of Muslims, that fills me with happiness...”

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās was constant in his devotions. He kept voluntary fasts regularly and often stayed up at night in Prayer. He would weep while praying and reading the Qur’ān. And when reciting verses dealing with death, resurrection and the life hereafter his voice would be heavy from deep sobbing.

He passed away at the age of seventy-one in the mountainous city of at-Ṭā’if.



10

Ramlah bint Abī Sufyān

Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb could not conceive of anyone among the Quraysh who would dare challenge his authority or go against his orders. He was after all, the *sayyid* or chieftain of Makkah who had to be obeyed and followed.

His daughter, Ramlah, known as Umm Ḥabībah, however dared to challenge his authority when she rejected the deities of the Quraysh and their idolatrous ways. Together with her husband, ‘Ubaydullāh ibn Jahsh, she put her faith in God alone and accepted the message of His prophet, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh.

Abū Sufyān tried with all the power and force at his disposal to bring back his daughter and her husband to his religion and the religion of their forefathers. But he did not succeed. The faith which was embedded in the heart of Ramlah was too strong to be uprooted by the hurricanes of Abū Sufyān’s fury.

Abū Sufyān remained deeply worried and concerned by his daughter’s acceptance of Islam. He did not know how to face the Quraysh after she had gone against his will and he was clearly powerless to prevent her from following Muḥammad. When the Quraysh realized though that Abū Sufyān himself was enraged by Ramlah and her

husband, they were emboldened to treat them harshly. They unleashed the full fury of their persecution against them to such a degree that life in Makkah became unbearable.

In the fifth year of his mission, the Prophet, peace be on him, gave permission to the Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia. Ramlah, her little daughter Ḥabībah, and her husband were among those who left.

Abū Sufyān and the Quraysh leaders found it difficult to accept that a group of Muslims had slipped out of their net of persecution and was enjoying the freedom to hold their beliefs and practice their religion in the land of the Negus. They therefore sent messengers to the Negus to seek their extradition. The messengers tried to poison the mind of the Negus against the Muslims but after examining the Muslims' beliefs and listening to the Qur'ān being recited, the Negus concluded:

"What has been revealed to your Prophet Muḥammad and what Jesus the son of Mary preached came from the same source."

The Negus himself announced his faith in the one true God and his acceptance of the prophethood of Muḥammad, peace be on him. He also announced his determination to protect the Muslim *muhājirīn*.

The long journey on the road of hardship and tribulation had finally led to an oasis of serenity. So Umm Ḥabībah felt. But she did not know that the new-found freedom and sense of peace were later to be shattered. She was to be put through a test of the most severe and harrowing kind.

One night, it is related, as Umm Ḥabībah was asleep she had a vision in which she saw her husband in the

midst of a fathomless ocean covered by wave upon wave of darkness. He was in a most perilous situation. She woke up, frightened. But she did not wish to tell her husband or anyone else what she had seen.

The day after that ominous night was not yet through when 'Ubaydallāh ibn Jaḥsh announced his rejection of Islam and his acceptance of Christianity. What a terrible blow! Ramlah's sense of peace was shattered. She did not expect this of her husband who presented her forthwith with the choice of a divorce or of accepting Christianity.

Umm Ḥabībah had three options before her. She could either remain with her husband and accept his call to become a Christian in which case she also would commit apostasy and - God forbid - deserve ignominy in this world and punishment in the hereafter. This was something she resolved she would never do even if she were subjected to the most horrible torture. Or, she could return to her father's house in Makkah knowing that he remained a citadel of *shirk* and that she would be forced to live under him, subdued and suppressing her faith. Or, she could stay alone in the land of the Negus as a displaced fugitive - without country, without family and without a supporter.

She made the choice that she considered was the most pleasing to God. She made up her mind to stay in Abyssinia until such time as God granted her relief. She divorced her husband who lived only a short while after becoming a Christian. He had given himself over to frequenting wine merchants and consuming alcohol, the "mother of evils". This undoubtedly helped to destroy him.

Umm Ḥabībah stayed in Abyssinia for about ten years.

Towards the end of this time, relief and happiness came. It came from an unexpected quarter.

One morning bright and early, there was a loud knocking on her door. It was Abrahah, the special maid-servant of the Negus. Abrahah was beaming with joy as she greeted Umm Ḥabībah and said:

"The Negus sends his greetings and says to you that Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, wants you to marry him and that he has sent a letter in which he has appointed him as his *wakīl* to contract the marriage between you and him. If you agree, you are to appoint a *wakīl* to act on your behalf."

Umm Ḥabībah was in the clouds with happiness. She shouted to herself:

"God has given you glad tidings. God has given you glad tidings." She took off her jewellery - her necklace and bracelets - and gave them to Abrahah. She took off her rings too and gave them to her. And indeed if she had possessed all the treasures of the world, she would have given them to Abrahah at that moment of sheer joy. Finally she said to Abrahah:

"I appoint Khālīd ibn Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣ to act as *wakīl* on my behalf for he is the closest person to me."

In the palace of the Negus, set in the midst of beautiful gardens and luxuriant vegetation and in one of the lavishly decorated, sumptuously furnished and brightly lit halls, the group of Muslims living in Abyssinia gathered. They included Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, Khālīd ibn Sa'īd, 'Abdullāh ibn Hudhāfah as-Sahmī and others. They had gathered to witness the conclusion of the marriage contract between Umm Ḥabībah, the daughter of Abū Sufyān, and Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. When the marriage

was finalized, the Negus addressed the gathering:

"I praise God, the Holy, and I declare that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is His Servant and His Messenger and that He gave the good tidings to Jesus the son of Mary.

"The Messenger of God, peace be on him, has requested me to conclude the marriage contract between him and Umm Ḥabībah the daughter of Abū Sufyān. I agreed to do what he requested and on his behalf I give her a *mahr* or dowry of four hundred gold dinars." He handed over the amount to Khālīd ibn Sa'īd who stood up and said:

"All praise is due to God. I praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness and I turn to Him in repentance. I declare that Muḥammad is His Servant and His Messenger whom He has sent with the religion of guidance and truth so that it might prevail over all other forms of religion even if the disbelievers were to dislike this.

"I have agreed to do what the Prophet, peace be upon him, has requested and acted as the *wakīl* on behalf of Umm Ḥabībah, the daughter of Abū Sufyān. May God bless His Messenger and his wife.

"Congratulations to Umm Ḥabībah on account of the goodness which God has ordained for her."

Khālīd took the *mahr* and handed it over to Umm Ḥabībah. The Ṣaḥābah thereupon got up and prepared to leave but the Negus said to them:

"Sit down for it is the practice of the Prophets to serve food at marriages."

There was general rejoicing at the court of the Negus as the guests sat down again to eat and celebrate the joyous occasion. Umm Ḥabībah especially could hardly believe her good fortune and she later described how she

was eager to share her happiness. She said:

"When I received the money as *mahr*, I sent fifty *mithqāls* of gold to Abrahah who had brought me the good news and I said to her:

'I gave you what I did when you gave me the good news because at that time I did not have any money.'

"Shortly afterwards, Abrahah came to me and returned the gold. She also produced a case which contained the necklace I had given to her. She returned that to me and said:

'The King has instructed me not to take anything from you and he has commanded the women in his household to present you with gifts of perfume.'

"On the following day, she brought me ambergris, saffron and aloes and said:

'I have a favour to ask of you.'

'What is it?' I asked.

'I have accepted Islam,' she said, 'and now follow the religion of Muḥammad. Convey to him my salutation of peace and let him know that I believe in God and His Prophet. Please don't forget.' She then helped me to get ready for my journey to the Prophet.

"When I met the Prophet, peace be on him, I told him all about the arrangements that were made for the marriage and about my relationship with Abrahah. I told him she had become a Muslim and conveyed to him her greetings of peace. He was filled with joy at the news and said:

'*Wa 'alayha as-salām wa raḥmatullāhi wa barakātuhu* and on her be peace and the mercy and blessings of God.'



11

'Amr ibn al-Jamūh

'Amr ibn al-Jamūh was one of the leading men in Yathrib in the days of Jāhiliyah. He was the chief of the Banū Salamah and was known to be one of the most generous and valiant persons in the city.

One of the privileges of the city's leaders was having an idol to himself in his house. It was hoped that this idol would bless the leader in whatever he did. He was expected to offer sacrifices to it on special occasions and seek its help at times of distress. The idol of 'Amr was called Manāt. He had made it from the most priceless wood. He spent a great deal of time, money and attention looking after it and he anointed it with the most exquisite perfumes.

'Amr was almost sixty years old when the first rays of the light of Islam began to penetrate the houses of Yathrib. House after house was introduced to the new faith at the hands of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, the first missionary sent out to Yathrib before the hijrah. It was through him that 'Amr's three sons - Mu'awwidh, Mu'ādh and Khallād - became Muslims. One of their contemporaries was the famous Mu'ādh ibn Jabal. 'Amr's wife, Hind, also accepted Islam with her three sons but 'Amr himself knew

was eager to share her happiness. She said:

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nothing of all this.

Hind saw that the people of Yathrib were being won over to Islam and that not one of the leaders of the city remained in *shirk* except her husband and a few individuals. She loved her husband dearly and was proud of him but she was concerned that he should die in a state of *kufr* and end up in hell-fire.

During this time, 'Amr himself began to feel uneasy. He was afraid that his sons would give up the religion of their forefathers and follow the teaching of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr who, within a short space of time, had caused many to turn away from idolatry and enter the religion of Muḥammad. To his wife, 'Amr therefore said:

"Be careful that your children do not come into contact with this man (meaning Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr) before we pronounce an opinion on him."

"To hear is to obey," she replied. "But would you like to hear from your son Mu'ādh what he relates from this man?"

"Woe to you! Has Mu'ādh turned away from his religion without my knowing?"

The good woman felt pity for the old man and said:

"Not at all. But he has attended some of the meetings of this missionary and memorized some of the things he teaches."

"Tell him to come here," he said. When Mu'ādh came, he ordered:

"Let me hear an example of what this man preaches."

Mu'ādh recited the *Fātiḥah* (the Opening Chapter of the Qur'ān):

"In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful. All praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of

all the worlds, the most Gracious, the most Merciful. Lord of the Day of Judgment!

You alone do we worship and You alone do we ask for help. Guide us on the straight path, the path of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings, not of those who deserve Your anger, nor of those who go astray."

"How perfect are these words, and how beautiful!" exclaimed the father. "Is everything he says like this?"

"Yes, indeed, father! Do you wish to swear allegiance to him? All your people have already done so," urged Mu'ādh.

The old man remained silent for a while and then said:

"I shall not do so until I consult Manāt and see what he says."

"What indeed would Manāt say, Father? It is only a piece of wood. It can neither think nor speak."

The old man retorted sharply:

"I told you, I shall not do anything without him."

Later that day, 'Amr went before Manāt. It was the custom of the idolators then to place an old woman behind the idol when they wished to speak to it. She would reply on behalf of the idol, articulating, so they thought, what the idol had inspired her to say. 'Amr stood before the idol in great awe and addressed profuse praises to it. Then he said:

"O Manāt, no doubt you know that this propagandist who was delegated to come to us from Makkah does not wish evil on anyone but you. He has come only to stop us worshipping you. I do not want to swear allegiance to him in spite of the beautiful words I have heard from him. I have thus come to get your advice. So please

advise me.”

There was no reply from Manāt. ‘Amr continued:

“Perhaps you are angry. But up till now, I have done nothing to harm you... Never mind, I shall leave you for a few days to let your anger go away.”

‘Amr’s sons knew the extent of their father’s dependence on Manāt and how with time he had become almost a part of it. They realized however that the idol’s place in his heart was being shaken and that they had to help him get rid of Manāt. That must be his path to faith in God.

One night ‘Amr’s sons went with their friend Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal to Manāt, took the idol from its place and threw it in a cess-pit belonging to the Banū Salamah. They returned to their homes with no one knowing anything about what they had done. When ‘Amr woke up the following morning, he went in quiet reverence to pay his respects to his idol but did not find it.

“Woe to you all,” he shouted. “Who has attacked our god last night?” There was no reply from anyone. He began to search for the idol, fuming with rage and threatening the perpetrators of the crime. Eventually he found the idol turned upside down on its head in the pit. He washed and perfumed it and returned it to its usual place saying:

“If I find out who did this to you, I will humiliate him.”

The following night the boys did the same to the idol. The old man recovered it, washed and perfumed it as he had done before and returned it to its place. This happened several times until one night ‘Amr put a sword around the idol’s neck and said to it: “O Manāt, I don’t know

who is doing this to you. If you have any power of good in you, defend yourself against this evil. Here is a sword for you.”

The youths waited until ‘Amr was fast asleep. They took the sword from the idol’s neck and threw it into the pit. ‘Amr found the idol lying face down in the pit with the sword nowhere in sight. At last he was convinced that the idol had no power at all and did not deserve to be worshipped. It was not long before he entered the religion of Islam.

‘Amr soon tasted the sweetness of *īmān* or faith in the One True God. At the same time he felt great pain and anguish within himself at the thought of every moment he had spent in *shirk*. His acceptance of the new religion was total and he placed himself, his wealth and his children in the service of God and His Prophet.

The extent of his devotion was shown during the time of the Battle of Uḥud. ‘Amr saw his three sons preparing for the battle. He looked at the three determined young men fired by the desire to gain success and the pleasure of God. The scene had a great effect on him and he resolved to go out with them to wage *jihād* to defend the fledgling Muslim community. The youths, however, were all against their father carrying out his resolve. He was already quite old and extremely weak.

“Father,” they said, “surely God has excused you. So why do you take this burden on yourself?”

The old man became quite angry and went straight away to the Prophet to complain about his sons:

“O Rasūlullāh! My sons here want to keep me away from this source of goodness arguing that I am old and decrepit. By God, I long to attain Paradise this way even

though I am old and infirm.”

“Let him,” said the Prophet to his sons. “Perhaps God, the Mighty and the Great, will grant him martyrdom.”

Soon it was time to go out to battle. ‘Amr bade farewell to his wife, turned to the *qiblah* and prayed:

“O Lord, grant me martyrdom and don’t send me back to my family with my hopes dashed.”

He then set out in the company of his three sons and a large contingent from his tribe, the Banū Salamah.

As the battle raged, ‘Amr could be seen moving in the front ranks, jumping on his good leg (his other leg was partially lame), and shouting, “I desire Paradise, I desire Paradise.”

His son Khallād remained closely behind him and they both fought courageously in defence of the Prophet while many other Muslims deserted in pursuit of booty. Father and son fell on the battlefield and died within moments of each other.



12

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd

When he was still a youth, not yet past the age of puberty, he used to roam the mountain trails of Makkah far away from people, tending the flocks of a Quraysh chieftain, ‘Uqbah ibn Mu‘ayt. People called him “Ibn Umm ‘Abd” - the son of the mother of a slave. His real name was ‘Abdullāh and his father’s name was Mas‘ūd.

The youth had heard the news of the Prophet who had appeared among his people but he did not attach any importance to it both because of his age and because he was usually far away from Makkan society. It was his custom to leave with the flock of ‘Uqbah early in the morning and not return until nightfall.

One day while tending the flocks, ‘Abdullāh saw two men, middle-aged and of dignified bearing, coming towards him from a distance. They were obviously very tired. They were also so thirsty that their lips and throats were quite dry. They came up to him, greeted him and said:

“Young man, milk one of these sheep for us that we may quench our thirst and recover our strength.”

“I cannot,” replied the young man. “The sheep are not mine. I am only responsible for looking after them.”

The two men did not argue with him. In fact, although they were so thirsty, they were extremely pleased at the honest reply. The pleasure showed on their faces.

The two men in fact were the blessed Prophet himself and his companion, Abū Bakr. They had gone out on that day to the mountains of Makkah to avoid the violent persecution of the Quraysh.

The young man in turn was impressed by the Prophet and his companion and soon became quite attached to them.

It was not long before ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd became a Muslim and offered to be in the service of the Prophet. The Prophet agreed and from that day the fortunate ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd gave up tending sheep in exchange for looking after the needs of the blessed Prophet.

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd remained closely attached to the Prophet. He would attend to his needs both inside and outside the house. He would accompany him on journeys and expeditions. He would wake him when he slept. He would shield him when he washed. He would carry his staff and his *siwāk* (toothbrush) and attend to his other personal needs. He was always concerned with the well-being and comfort of the noble Prophet. He has, for example, related that the Prophet slept on a reed mat and got up with the marks of it on his body so he said to him:

“Messenger of God, I wish you would order us to spread something out for you and make something (comfortable)”.

“What have I to do with this world?” replied the noble Prophet. “In relation to the world, I am just like a rider who shades himself under a tree, then goes off and leaves it.”

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd received a unique training in the household of the Prophet. He was under the guidance of the Prophet. He adopted his manner and followed his every trait until it was said of him, “He was the closest to the Prophet in character.” He was indeed well-placed to record many of the accounts of and incidents in the Prophet’s life such as this touching tale:

“We were with the Messenger of God, peace be on him, during a journey. He went to ease himself. We saw a bird with her two young ones and we captured the young ones. The bird came and began to spread her wings. The Messenger of God returned and asked:

“Who has caused this bird to grieve for its young ones?”

And he commanded:

“Return her young ones to her.”

He also saw an ant colony that we had burnt and he asked:

“Who burnt this?”

“We,” we replied.

“It is not proper to punish with fire except for the Lord of the fire,” he warned.

‘Abdullāh was thus taught in the continuous ‘school’ of the Prophet. He was the best reciter of the Qur’ān among the companions and he understood it better than most of them. He was therefore one of the most knowledgeable on the Shari‘ah. Nothing can illustrate this better than the story of the man who came to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as he was standing on the plain of ‘Arafāt and said:

“I have come, O Āmir al-Mu‘minin, from Kūfah where I left a man filling copies of the Qur’ān from memory.” ‘Umar became very angry and paced up and down beside

his camel, fuming.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd," replied the man. 'Umar's anger subsided and he regained his composure.

"Woe to you," he said to the man. "By God, I don't know of any person left who is more qualified in this matter than he is. Let me tell you about this."

'Umar continued:

"One night the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, was having a conversation with Abū Bakr about the situation of Muslims. I was with them. When the Prophet left, we left with him also and as we passed through the mosque, there was a man standing in Prayer whom we did not recognize. The Prophet stood and listened to him, then turned to us and said, 'Whoever wants to read the Qur'ān as fresh as when it was revealed, then let him read according to the recitation of Ibn Umm 'Abd.'

"After the Prayer, as 'Abdullāh sat making supplications, the Prophet, peace be on him, said, 'Ask and it will be given to you. Ask and it will be given to you.'"

'Umar continued:

"I said to myself, I shall go to 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd straight away and tell him the good news of the Prophet's assuring acceptance of his supplications. I went and did so but found that Abū Bakr had gone before me and conveyed the good news to him. By God, I have never yet beaten Abū Bakr in the doing of any good."

'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd was in fact the first of four persons recommended by the noble Prophet for the recitation of the Qur'ān. A fellow companion, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr, said of him: "That is a man I continue to love because I heard the Messenger of God, peace be on him,

saying, 'Learn the Qur'ān from four persons - 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Sālim Mawlā Abū Ḥudhayfah, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and Mu'ādh ibn Jabal.'"

In connection with the recitation of the Qur'ān, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd related the following:

The Messenger of Allāh, peace be on him, said to me:

"Recite (of the Qur'ān) for me."

"Shall I recite it to you although it has been revealed to you?"

"I like to hear (the Qur'ān) from others," he said. So I recited Sūrah an-Nisā' till I reached 'How (will it be) then when We bring from every nation a witness and when We bring you (O Muḥammad) as a witness against these people?' (4: 41).

"Stop," said the noble Prophet. And behold his eyes were overflowing with tears.

'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd attained such a knowledge of the Qur'ān that he would say, "By Him besides Whom there is no god, no verse of the book of God has been revealed without my knowing where it was revealed and the circumstances of its revelation. By God, if I know there was anyone who knew more of the Book of Allāh, I will do whatever is in my power to be with him."

Although 'Abdullāh possessed this vast knowledge of the Qur'ān and was ever thirsty to learn more, he was not proud or arrogant. He acknowledged that while he was among the best in reciting the Qur'ān, he did not regard himself as the best of the Prophet's companions. He once gave a sermon in which he said:

"I learnt over seventy sūrahs direct from God's

Messenger, peace be on him. By Allāh, the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, came to know that I am one of those who know God's Book best of all of them, yet I am not the best of them."

'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd not only had great knowledge but took care in imparting this knowledge. When he was asked any questions about Islam, he would answer precisely according to his knowledge. If he did not know the answer to a question, he would say clearly that he did not know. His advice was: "He who has knowledge of something can speak about it, but if he does not know, he should say 'Allāh knows best'. It is an aspect of knowledge to say 'Allāh knows best' if you do not know a certain matter." A 'pond whose fresh water has been used up and nothing remains but muddy water' is how he described a person who fabricates and mixes up truth and falsehood.

The companions therefore had a great trust in his knowledge and reliability. "Believe what Ibn Mas'ūd tells you," the noble Prophet is reported to have told his companions. He had an excellent understanding of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Sunnah or example of the noble Prophet. In this connection, he laid the proper stress on the Qur'anic verse:

"And whatever the Messenger has brought you, adopt it; and whatever he has forbidden you, abandon it."

In his teaching of Islam, he was concerned not to make people bored by talking too often. He used to give a talk once a week on Thursdays and one of his listeners urged him, "By Allāh, I wish you could preach to us daily." "The only thing which prevents me from doing so," replied Ibn Mas'ūd, "is that I hate to bore you. No doubt I take care of you in preaching by selecting a suitable

time as the Prophet, peace be on him, used to do with us, for fear of making us bored."

'Abdullāh's intimate knowledge of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah was often put to the test. Once 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb met a caravan on one of his journeys as caliph. It was pitch dark and the caravan could not be seen properly. 'Umar ordered someone to hail the caravan. It happened that 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd was in it.

"From where do you come?" asked 'Umar.

"From a deep valley," came the reply. (The expression used - *fajj 'amīq* or deep valley - is a Qur'anic one).

"And where are you going?" asked 'Umar.

"To the ancient house," came the reply. (The expression used *al-bayt al-'atīq* or the ancient house, is a Qur'anic one, referring to the Ka'bah.)

"There is a learned person (*'ālim*) among them," said 'Umar and he commanded someone to ask the person:

"Which part of the Qur'ān is the greatest?"

"God. There is no god except Him, the Living, the Self-subsisting. Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep," replied the person answering, quoting the Āyat al-Kursī or the verse of the Throne. (Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2: 255).

"Which part of the Qur'ān is the most clear on justice?"

"God commands what is just and beautiful (*iḥsān*) the feeding of relatives..." came the answer.

"What is the most comprehensive statement of the Qur'ān?"

"Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it."

"Which part of the Qur'ān gives rise to the greatest hope?"

"Say, O My servants who have wasted their resources,

do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins. He is the Forgiving, the Compassionate."

Thereupon 'Umar asked:

"Is 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd among you?"

"Yes, by God," the men in the caravan replied.

'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd was not only a reciter of the Qur'ān, a learned man or a fervent worshipper. He was in addition a strong and courageous fighter, one who became deadly serious when the occasion demanded it.

The companions of the Prophet were together one day in Makkah. They were still few in number, weak and oppressed. They said, "The Quraysh have not yet heard the Qur'ān being recited openly and loudly. Who is the man who could recite it for them?"

"I shall recite it for them," volunteered 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd. "We are afraid for you," they said. "We only want someone who has a clan who would protect him from their evil."

"Let me," 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd insisted, "Allāh shall protect me and keep me away from their evil." He then went out to the mosque until he reached Maqām Ibrāhīm (a few metres from the Ka'bah). It was dawn and the Quraysh were sitting around the Ka'bah. 'Abdullāh stopped at the Maqām and began to recite:

"Bismillāhi-r Raḥmāni-r Raḥīm. Ar-Raḥmān. 'Allama-l Qur'ān. Khalaqa-l insān. 'Allamahu-l bayān... (In the name of God, most Gracious, most Merciful. The most Gracious! He has taught the Qur'ān. He has created man and taught him the clear truth..." (Sūrah ar-Raḥmān, 55: 1-4).

He went on reciting. The Quraysh looked at him intently and some of them asked:

"What is Ibn Umm 'Abd saying?"

"Damn him! He is reciting some of what Muḥammad brought!" they realized.

They went up to him and began beating him as he continued reciting. When he went back to his companions, blood was flowing from his face.

"This is what we feared for you," they said.

"By God," replied 'Abdullāh, "the enemies of God are not more comfortable than I am at this moment. If you wish. I shall go out tomorrow and do the same."

"You have done enough," they said. "You have made them hear what they dislike."

Another famous example of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's confidence and courage took place on the battlefield of Badr. Ibn Mas'ūd, the person of humble beginnings, searched for and found the notorious Abū Jahl who had spent years persecuting the noble Prophet and his companions. As he lay prostrate, Abū Jahl was able to recognize the one whom he had struck a severe blow and wounded in front of the Ka'bah for reciting the Qur'ān aloud. This son of a slave now placed his foot on the neck of the Quraysh chieftain who remained proud, disdainful and unrepentant to the bitter end.

"You have climbed high indeed, little shepherd," he said as 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd dealt him the final blow.

'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd lived to the time of Khalīfah 'Uthmān, may God be pleased with him. When he was sick and on his death-bed, 'Uthmān came to visit him and asked:

"What is your ailment?"

"My sins."

"And what do you desire?"

"The mercy of my Lord."

"Shall I not give you your stipend which you have refused to take for years now?"

"I have no need of it."

"Let it be for your daughters after you."

"Do you fear poverty for my children? I have commanded them to read *Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah* every night for I have heard the Prophet saying, "Whoever reads *Al-Wāqī'ah* every night shall not be afflicted by poverty ever."

That night, 'Abdullāh passed away to the company of his Lord, his tongue moist with the remembrance of God and with the recitation of the verses of His Book.



13

Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh

His appearance was striking. He was slim and tall. His face was bright and he had a sparse beard. It was pleasing to look at him and refreshing to meet him. He was extremely courteous and humble and quite shy. Yet in a tough situation he would become strikingly serious and alert, resembling the flashing blade of a sword in his severity and sharpness.

He was described as the *Amīn* or Custodian of Muḥammad's community. His full name was 'Āmir ibn 'Abdullāh ibn al-Jarrāh. He was known as Abū 'Ubaydah. Of him 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, one of the companions of the Prophet, said:

"Three persons in the tribe of Quraysh were most prominent, had the best character and were the most modest. If they spoke to you, they would not deceive you and if you spoke to them, they would not accuse you of lying: Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh."

Abū 'Ubaydah was one of the first persons to accept Islam. He became a Muslim one day after Abū Bakr. In fact, it was through Abū Bakr that he became a Muslim. Abū Bakr took him, 'Abdur Raḥmān ibn 'Awf, 'Uthmān

"The mercy of my Lord."

"Shall I not give you your stipend which you have refused to take for years now?"

"I have no need of it."

"Let it be for your daughters after you."

"Do you fear poverty for my children? I have commanded them to read *Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah* every night for I have heard the Prophet saying, "Whoever reads *Al-Wāqī'ah* every night shall not be afflicted by poverty ever."

That night, 'Abdullāh passed away to the company of his Lord, his tongue moist with the remembrance of God and with the recitation of the verses of His Book.



13

Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh

His appearance was striking. He was slim and tall. His face was bright and he had a sparse beard. It was pleasing to look at him and refreshing to meet him. He was extremely courteous and humble and quite shy. Yet in a tough situation he would become strikingly serious and alert, resembling the flashing blade of a sword in his severity and sharpness.

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ibn Maz'ūn and al-Arqam ibn Abī al-Arqam to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and together they declared their acceptance of the Truth. They were thus the first pillars on which the great edifice of Islam was built.

Abū 'Ubaydah lived through the harsh experience which the Muslims went through in Makkah, from beginning to end. With the early Muslims, he endured the insults and the violence, the pain and the sorrow of that experience. In every trial and test he remained firm and constant in his belief in God and His prophet. One of the most harrowing experiences he had to go through, however, was at the Battle of Badr.

Abū 'Ubaydah was in the vanguard of the Muslim forces, fighting with might and main and as someone who was not at all afraid of death. The Quraysh cavalry were extremely wary of him and avoided coming face to face with him. One man in particular, however, kept on pursuing Abū 'Ubaydah wherever he turned and Abū 'Ubaydah tried his best to keep out of his way and avoid an encounter with him.

The man plunged into the attack. Abū 'Ubaydah tried desperately to avoid him. Eventually the man succeeded in blocking Abū 'Ubaydah's path and stood as a barrier between him and the Quraysh. They were now face to face with each other. Abū 'Ubaydah could not contain himself any longer. He struck one blow to the man's head. The man fell to the ground and died instantly.

Do not try to guess who this man was. It was, as stated earlier, one of the most harrowing experiences that Abū 'Ubaydah had to go through - how harrowing, it is almost impossible to imagine. The man in fact was 'Abdullāh ibn al-Jarrāh, the father of Abū 'Ubaydah!

Abū 'Ubaydah obviously did not want to kill his father but in the actual battle between faith in God and polytheism, the choice open to him was profoundly disturbing but clear. In a way it could be said that he did not kill his father - he only killed the polytheism in the person of his father.

It is concerning this event that God revealed the following verses of the Qur'ān:

"You will not find a people believing in God and the Last Day making friends with those who oppose God and His Messenger even if these were their fathers, their sons, their brothers or their clan. God has placed faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him. He will cause them to enter gardens beneath which streams flow that they may dwell therein. God is well pleased with them and they well pleased with Him. They are the party of God. Is not the party of God the successful ones?" (Sūrah al-Mujādilah, 58: 22)

The response of Abū 'Ubaydah at Badr when confronted by his father was not unexpected. He had attained a strength of faith in God, devotion to His religion and a level of concern for the ummah of Muḥammad to which many aspired.

It is related by Muḥammad ibn Ja'far, a companion of the Prophet, that a Christian delegation from Najrān came to the Prophet and said:

"O Abū-l Qāsim, send one of your companions with us, one in whom you are well pleased, to judge between us on some questions of property about which we disagree among ourselves. We have a high regard for you Muslim people."

"Come back to me this evening," replied the Prophet,

"and I will send with you one who is strong and trustworthy."

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard the Prophet saying this and later said:

"I went to the *Zuhr* (midday) Prayer early hoping to be the one who would fit the description of the Prophet. When the Prophet had finished the Prayer, he began looking to his right and his left and I raised myself so that he could see me. But he continued looking among us until he spotted Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ. He called him and said, 'Go with them and judge among them with truth about that which they are in disagreement.' And so Abū 'Ubaydah got the appointment."

Abū 'Ubaydah was not only trustworthy. He displayed a great deal of strength in the discharge of his trust. This strength was shown on several occasions.

In the early Madīnan days the Prophet dispatched an expedition consisting of three hundred men to the Red Sea coast to meet a Quraysh caravan and appointed Abū 'Ubaydah as their *amīr* or commander. During the expedition, provisions became critically short. Abū 'Ubaydah ordered that all the food carried by the troops be collected. There were only dates and Abū 'Ubaydah gave out rations which decreased to such an extent that he eventually allowed only one date each per day.

"What use is one date?" Abū 'Ubaydah was asked and he replied:

"We will certainly feel its loss when even this is finished."

The famished contingent eventually reached the shores of the Red sea where, according to Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh, they stayed for half a month and were "struck by such

severe hunger that we even ate the *khawat* (or leaves of the thorny *salam* or acacia tree)". On that account the expeditionary force became known as the Jaysh al-Khawāt.

Then to their utter amazement and delight, the sea cast ashore a massive "fish", the size of "a small mountain". So huge was it that when Abū 'Ubaydah took one of its ribs and fixed it to the ground a man mounted on a camel was able to pass under it. The "fish" was in fact an *anbar* or a whale and Abū 'Ubaydah's discipline ensured that it provided food for his men for more than two weeks. They also rubbed its fat on their bodies and this helped them recover their health and strength.

On the day of Uḥud when the Muslims were being routed, one of the *mushrikīn* started to shout, "Show me Muḥammad, show me Muḥammad." Abū 'Ubaydah was one of a group of ten Muslims who had encircled the Prophet to protect him against the spears of the *mushrikīn*.

When the battle was over, it was found that one of the Prophet's molar teeth was broken, his forehead was bashed in and two discs from his shield had penetrated into his cheeks. Abū Bakr went forward with the intention of extracting these discs but Abū 'Ubaydah said:

"Please leave that to me."

Abū 'Ubaydah was afraid that he would cause the Prophet pain if he took out the discs with his hand. He bit hard into one of the discs. It was extracted but one of his incisor teeth fell to the ground in the process. With his other incisor, he extracted the other disc but lost that tooth also. Abū Bakr remarked:

"Abū 'Ubaydah is the best of men at breaking incisor teeth!"

In other sensitive missions, Abū 'Ubaydah was the one

chosen by the noble Prophet. With the spread of Islam during the later Madinan years, the Prophet established contact with the people of Bahrain and made peace with them. He appointed a governor and sent Abū 'Ubaydah to collect the *jizyah*, the protection and military exemption tax. Abū 'Ubaydah returned to Madinah one night before the time of the Fajr Prayer. After leading the Prayer, the Prophet turned to the congregation, smiled and said:

"I sense that you have heard that Abū 'Ubaydah has brought something."

"Yes, Messenger of God," they said and the Prophet responded with reassuring but sobering words:

"Rejoice," he said, "and hope for that which will please you. By God, I do not fear poverty for you but I am afraid that you will lead a life of luxury as past nations have done, that you will compete with one another for it as they competed, and that it will destroy you as it destroyed them."

Abū 'Ubaydah continued to be fully involved in all the momentous events during the Prophet's lifetime. After the beloved Prophet had passed away, the companions gathered to choose a successor at the *Saqīfah* or meeting place of Banū Sa'ādah. This critical day is known in history as the Day of Saqīfah. On this day, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said to Abū 'Ubaydah:

"Stretch forth your hand and I will swear allegiance to you for I heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, say, 'Every ummah has an *amin* (custodian) and you are the *amin* of this ummah.'"

"I would not," declared Abū 'Ubaydah, "put myself forward in the presence of a man whom the Prophet, upon whom be peace, commanded to lead us in Prayer

and who led us right until the Prophet's death." He then gave *bay'ah* (the oath of allegiance) to Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, thus demonstrating not only his outstanding stature but his wisdom, understanding and humility.

Abū 'Ubaydah continued to be a close adviser to Abū Bakr and his strong supporter in the cause of truth and goodness. Then came the caliphate of 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah also gave him his support and obedience. He did not disobey him in any matter, except one.

The incident happened when Abū 'Ubaydah was in Syria leading the Muslim forces from one victory to another until the whole of Syria was under Muslim control. The River Euphrates lay to his right and Asia Minor to his left.

It was then that a plague hit the land of Syria, the like of which people had never experienced before. It devastated the population. 'Umar dispatched a messenger to Abū 'Ubaydah with a letter saying:

"I am in urgent need of you. If my letter reaches you at night I strongly urge you to leave before dawn. If this letter reaches you during the day, I strongly urge you to leave before evening and hasten to me."

When Abū 'Ubaydah received 'Umar's letter, he said, "I know why the Amīr al-Mu'minīn needs me. He wants to secure the survival of someone who, however, is not eternal." So he wrote to 'Umar:

"I know that you need me. But I am in an army of Muslims and I have no desire to save myself from what is afflicting them. I do not want to separate from them until God wills. So, when this letter reaches you, release me from your command and permit me to stay on."

When 'Umar read this letter tears filled his eyes and

those who were with him asked, "Has Abū 'Ubaydah died, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn?"

"No," said he, "But death is near to him."

'Umar's intuition was not wrong. Before long, Abū 'Ubaydah was afflicted by the plague. As death hung over him, he spoke to his army:

"Let me give you some advice which will cause you to be on the path of goodness always.

"Establish Ṣalāt. Fast the month of Ramaḍān. Give Sadaqah. Perform the Ḥajj and 'Umrah. Remain united and support one another. Be sincere to your commanders and do not conceal anything from them. Don't let the world destroy you for even if man were to live a thousand years he would still end up with this state that you see me in." And he ended his advice with the familiar but sublime words which are at once a greeting, a wish and a prayer: "*As-salāmu 'alaykum wa raḥmatullāh* - Peace be upon you and the mercy of God."

"Peace be upon you and the mercy of God."

Abū 'Ubaydah then turned to Mu'ādh ibn Jabal and said:

"O Mu'ādh, perform the prayer with the people (be their leader)." At this, his pure soul departed.

Mu'ādh got up and said:

"O people, you are stricken by the death of a man. By God, I don't know whether I have seen a man who had a more righteous heart, who was further from all evil and who was more sincere to people than he. Ask God to shower His mercy on him and God will be merciful to you."



14

Al-Barā' ibn Mālīk

His hair looked dishevelled and his whole appearance was unkempt. He was thin and wiry with so little flesh on his bones that it was painful to look at him. Yet in single handed combat he defeated many opponents and in the thick of battle he was an outstanding fighter against the *mushrikīn*. He was so courageous and daring that 'Umar once wrote to his governors throughout the Islamic state that they should not appoint him to lead any army out of fear that he would have them all killed by his daring exploits. This man was al-Barā' ibn Mālīk al-Anṣārī, the brother of Anas ibn Mālīk, the personal aide of the Prophet.

If the tales of al-Barā's heroism were to be told in detail pages and pages could be written. But let one example suffice.

This particular story begins only hours after the death of the noble Prophet when many Arabian tribes took to leaving the religion of God in large numbers, just as they had entered it in large numbers. Within a short space of time only the people of Makkah, Madīnah, aṭ-Ṭā'if and scattered communities here and there, whose commitment

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This particular story begins only hours after the death of the noble Prophet when many Arabian tribes took to leaving the religion of God in large numbers, just as they had entered it in large numbers. Within a short space of time only the people of Makkah, Madīnah, aṭ-Ṭā'if and scattered communities here and there, whose commitment

to Islam was unwavering, remained within the religion.

Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, the successor to the Prophet, stood firm against this blind and destructive movement. From the Muhājirīn and Anṣār, he mobilized eleven armies each under a separate commander and dispatched them to various parts of the Arabian peninsula. Their purpose was to make the apostates return to the path of guidance and truth and to confront the leaders of the rebellion.

The strongest group of apostates and the greatest in number were the Banū Ḥanīfah among whom Musaylamah the Imposter arose, claiming that he was a prophet. Musaylamah managed to mobilize forty thousand of the best fighters among his people. Most of these however followed him for the sake of *‘aṣabīyah* or tribal loyalty and not because they believed in him. One of them in fact said, “I testify that Musaylamah is an impostor and that Muḥammad is true but the impostor of Rabī‘ah (Musaylamah) is dearer to us than the true man of Muḍar (Muḥammad).”

Musaylamah routed the first army sent against him under the leadership of ‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl. Abū Bakr dispatched another army against Musaylamah led by Khālīd ibn al-Walīd. This army included the cream of the Ṣahābah from both the Anṣār and the Muhājirīn. In the front ranks of this army was al-Barā’ ibn Mālīk and a group of the most valiant Muslims.

The two armies met in the territory of the Banū Ḥanīfah at Yamāmah in Najd. Before long, the scale of battle tilted in favour of Musaylamah and his men. The Muslim armies began to retreat from their positions. Musaylamah’s forces even stormed the tent of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd and drove him from his position. They would have killed his

wife if one of them had not granted her protection.

At that point, the Muslims realized in what a perilous situation they were. They were also conscious of the fact that if they were annihilated by Musaylamah, Islam would not be able to stand as a religion and Allāh - the One God with whom there is no partner - would not be worshipped in the Arabian peninsula after that.

Khālīd mustered his forces once more and began reorganizing them. He separated the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār and kept men from different tribes apart. Each was put under the leadership of one of its own members so that the losses of each group in the battle might be known.

The battle raged. There was much destruction and death. The Muslims had not experienced anything like this in all the wars they had fought before. Musaylamah’s men remained firm amidst the tumult, as firm as immovable mountains although many of them had fallen.

The Muslims displayed tremendous feats of heroism. Thābit ibn Qays, the standard bearer of the Anṣār, dug a pit and planted himself in it and fought until he was killed. The pit he dug turned out to be his grave. Zayd ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, brother of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with them both, called out to the Muslims:

“Men, bite with your jaw teeth, strike the enemy and press on. By God, I shall not speak to you after this until either Musaylamah is defeated or I meet God.”

He then charged against the enemy and continued fighting until he was killed. Sālīm, the *mawlā* of Abū Ḥudhayfah, and standard bearer of the Muhājirīn displayed unexpected valour. His people feared that he would show weakness or be too terrified to fight. To them he said, “If you manage to overtake me, what a miserable bearer of

the Qur'ān I shall be." He then valiantly plunged into the enemy ranks and eventually fell as a martyr.

The bravery of all these, however, wanes in front of the heroism of al-Barā' ibn Mālik, may God be pleased with him and with them all.

As the battle grew fiercer and fiercer, Khālid turned to al-Barā' and said, "Charge, young man of the Anṣār." Al-Barā' turned to his men and said, "O Anṣār, let not anyone of you think of returning to Madīnah. There is no Madīnah for you after this day. There is only Allāh, then Paradise."

He and the Anṣār then launched their attack against the mushrikīn, breaking their ranks and dealing telling blows against them until eventually they began to withdraw. They sought refuge in a garden which later became known in history as The Garden of Death because of the many killed there on that day. The garden was surrounded by high walls. Musaylamah and thousands of his men entered and closed the gates behind them and fortified themselves. From their new positions they began to rain down arrows on the Muslims.

The valiant al-Barā' went forward and addressed his company, "Put me on a shield. Raise the shield on spears and hurl me into the garden near the gate. Either I shall die a martyr or I shall open the gate for you."

The thin and wiry al-Barā' was soon sitting on a shield. A number of spears raised the shield and he was thrown into the Garden of Death amongst the multitude of Musaylamah's men. He descended on them like a thunderbolt and continued to fight them in front of the gate. Many fell to his sword and he himself sustained numerous wounds before he could open the gate.

The Muslims charged into the Garden of Death through

the gate and over the walls. Fighting was bitter and at close quarters and hundreds were killed. Finally the Muslims came upon Musaylamah and he was killed.

Al-Barā' was taken in a litter to Madīnah. Khālid ibn al-Walid spent a month looking after him and tending his wounds. Eventually his condition improved. Through him the Muslims had gained victory over Musaylamah.

In spite of recovering from his wounds, al-Barā' continued to long for the martyrdom which had eluded him at the Garden of Death. He went on fighting in battle after battle hoping to attain his aim. This came at the battle for Tustar in Persia.

At Tustar the Persians were besieged in one of their defiant fortresses. The siege was long and when its effects became quite unbearable, they adopted a new tactic. From the walls of the fortress, they began to throw down iron chains at the ends of which were fastened iron hooks which were red hot. Muslims were caught by these hooks and were pulled up either dead or in the agony of death.

One of these hooks got hold of Anas ibn Mālik, the brother of al-Barā'. As soon as al-Barā' saw this, he leapt up the wall of the fortress and grabbed the chain which bore his brother and began undoing the hook from his body. His hand began to burn but he did not let go before his brother was released.

Al-Barā' himself died during this battle. He had prayed to God to grant him martyrdom.

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15

Asmā' bint Abī Bakr

Asmā' bint Abī Bakr belonged to a distinguished Muslim family. Her father, Abū Bakr, was a close friend of the Prophet and the first Khalīfah after his death. Her half-sister, 'Ā'ishah, was a wife of the Prophet and one of the *Ummahāt al-Mu'minīn*. Her husband, Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām, was one of the special personal aides of the Prophet. Her son, 'Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr, became well-known for his incorruptibility and his unswerving devotion to Truth.

Asmā' herself was one of the first persons to accept Islam. Only about seventeen persons including both men and women became Muslims before her. She was later given the nickname *Dhāt an-Nitāqayn* (the One with the Two Waistbands) because of an incident connected with the departure of the Prophet and her father from Makkah on the historic hijrah to Madīnah.

Asmā' was one of the few persons who knew of the Prophet's plan to leave for Madīnah. The utmost secrecy had to be maintained because of the Quraysh plans to murder the Prophet. On the night of their departure, Asmā' was the one who prepared a bag of food and a water container for their journey. She did not find anything

though with which to tie the containers and decided to use her waistband or *nitāq*. Abū Bakr suggested that she tear it into two. This she did and the Prophet commended her action. From then on she became known as "the One with the Two Waistbands".

When the final emigration from Makkah to Madīnah took place soon after the departure of the Prophet, Asmā' was pregnant. She did not let her pregnancy or the prospect of a long and arduous journey deter her from leaving. As soon as she reached Qubā' on the outskirts of Madīnah, she gave birth to a son, 'Abdullāh. The Muslims shouted *Allāhu Akbar* (God is most Great) and *Lā ilāha illa Allāh* (There is no god but Allāh) in happiness and thanksgiving because this was the first child to be born to the muhājirīn in Madīnah.

Asmā' became known for her fine and noble qualities and for the keenness of her intelligence. She was an extremely generous person. Her son 'Abdullāh once said of her, "I have not seen two women more generous than my aunt 'Ā'ishah and my mother Asmā'. But their generosity was expressed in different ways. My aunt would accumulate one thing after another until she had gathered what she felt was sufficient and then distributed it all to those in need. My mother, on the other hand, would not keep anything even for the morrow."

Asmā's presence of mind in difficult circumstances was remarkable. When her father left Makkah, he took all his wealth, amounting to some six thousand dirhams, with him and did not leave any for his family. When Abū Bakr's father, Abū Quhāfah (he was still a *mushrik*) heard of his departure he went to his house and said to Asmā':

"I understand that he has left you bereft of money after

he himself has abandoned you.”

“No, grandfather,” replied Asmā’, “in fact he has left us much money.” She took some pebbles and put them in a small recess in the wall where they used to put money. She threw a cloth over the heap and took the hand of her grandfather - he was blind - and said, “See how much money he has left us.”

Through this stratagem, Asmā’ wanted to allay the fears of the old man and to forestall him from giving them anything of his own wealth. This was because she disliked receiving any assistance from a *mushrik* even if it was her own grandfather.

She had a similar attitude to her mother and was not inclined to compromise her honour and her faith. Her mother, Qutaylah, once came to visit her in Madinah. She was not a Muslim and was divorced from her father in pre-Islamic times. Her mother brought her gifts of raisins, clarified butter and *qaraz* (pods of a species of sant tree). Asmā’ at first refused to admit her into her house or accept the gifts. She sent someone to ‘Ā’ishah to ask the Prophet, peace be upon him, about her attitude to her mother and he replied that she should certainly admit her to her house and accept the gifts. On this occasion, the following revelation came to the Prophet:

“God forbids you not, with regard to those who do not fight you because of your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. God loves those who are just. God only forbids you with regard to those who fight you for your faith, and drive you from your homes, and support others in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances) that do wrong.”

(*The Qur’ān*, Sūrah al-Mumtaḥanah, 60: 8-9).

For Asmā’ and indeed for many other Muslims, life in Madinah was rather difficult at first. Her husband was quite poor and his only major possession to begin with was a horse he had bought. Asmā’ herself described these early days:

“I used to provide fodder for the horse, give it water and groom it. I would grind grain and make dough but I could not bake well. The women of the Anṣār used to bake for me. They were truly good women. I used to carry the grain on my head from az-Zubayr’s plot which the Prophet had allocated to him to cultivate. It was about three farsakh (about eight kilometres) from the town’s centre. One day I was on the road carrying the grain on my head when I met the Prophet and a group of Ṣaḥābah. He called out to me and stopped his camel so that I could ride behind him. I felt embarrassed to travel with the Prophet and also remembered az-Zubayr’s jealousy - he was the most jealous of men. The Prophet realized that I was embarrassed and rode on.”

Later, Asmā’ related to az-Zubayr exactly what had happened and he said, “By God, that you should have to carry grain is far more distressing to me than your riding with (the Prophet).”

Asmā’ obviously then was a person of great sensitivity and devotion. She and her husband worked extremely hard together until their situation of poverty gradually changed. At times, however, az-Zubayr treated her harshly. Once she went to her father and complained to him about this. His reply to her was: “My daughter, have *ṣabr* for if a woman has a righteous husband and he dies and she does not marry after him, they will be brought together

again in Paradise.”

Az-Zubayr eventually became one of the richest men among the Ṣaḥābah but Asmā’ did not allow this to corrupt her principles. Her son, al-Mundhir, once sent her an elegant dress from ‘Irāq made of fine and costly material. Asmā’ by this time was blind. She felt the material and said, “It’s awful. Take it back to him.”

Al-Mundhir was upset and said, “Mother, it was not transparent.”

“It may not be transparent,” she retorted, “but it is too tight fitting and shows the contours of the body.”

Al-Mundhir bought another dress that met with her approval and she accepted it.

If the above incidents and aspects of Asmā’s life may easily be forgotten, then her final meeting with her son, ‘Abdullāh, must remain one of the most unforgettable moments in early Muslim history. At that meeting she demonstrated the keenness of her intelligence, her resoluteness and the strength of her faith.

‘Abdullāh was in the running for the Caliphate after the death of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah. The Ḥijāz, Egypt, ‘Irāq, Khurāsān and much of Syria were favourable to him and acknowledged him as the Caliph. The Umayyads however continued to contest the Caliphate and to field a massive army under the command of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ath-Thaqafī. Relentless battles were fought between the two sides during which ‘Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr displayed great acts of courage and heroism. Many of his supporters however could not withstand the continuous strain of battle and gradually began to desert him. Finally he sought refuge in the Sacred Mosque at Makkah. It was then that he went to his mother, now an old blind woman,

and said:

“Peace be on you, Mother, and the mercy and blessings of God.”

“Unto you be peace, ‘Abdullāh,” she replied. “What is it that brings you here at this hour while boulders from al-Ḥajjāj’s catapults are raining down on your soldiers in the Ḥaram and shaking the houses of Makkah?”

“I came to seek your advice,” he said.

“To seek my advice?” she asked in astonishment. “About what?”

“The people have deserted me out of fear of al-Ḥajjāj or being tempted by what he has to offer. Even my children and my family have left me. There is only a small group of men with me now and however strong and steadfast they are they can only resist for an hour or two more. Messengers of the Banū Umayyah (the Umayyads) are now negotiating with me, offering to give me whatever worldly possessions I want to lay down my arms and swear allegiance to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. What do you think?”

Raising her voice, she replied:

“It’s your affair, ‘Abdullāh, and you know yourself better. If however you think that you are right and that you are standing up for the Truth, then persevere and fight on as your companions who were killed under your flag had shown perseverance. If however you desire the world, what a miserable wretch you are. You would have destroyed yourself and you would have destroyed your men.”

“But I will be killed today, there is no doubt about it.”

“That is better for you than that you should surrender yourself to al-Ḥajjāj voluntarily and that some minions of

Banū Umayyah should play with your head."

"I do not fear death. I am only afraid that they will mutilate me."

"There is nothing after death that man should be afraid of. Skinning does not cause any pain to the slaughtered sheep."

'Abdullāh's face beamed as he said:

"What a blessed mother! Blessed be your noble qualities! I have come to you at this hour to hear what I have heard. God knows that I have not weakened or despaired. He is witness over me that I have not stood up for what I have out of love for this world and its attractions but only out of anger for the sake of God. His limits have been transgressed. Here am I, going to what is pleasing to you. So if I am killed, do not grieve for me and commend me to God."

"I shall grieve for you," said the ageing but resolute Asmā', "only if you are killed in a vain and unjust cause."

"Be assured that your son has not supported an unjust cause, nor committed any detestable deed, nor done any injustice to a Muslim or a *Dhimmi* and that there is nothing better in his sight than the pleasure of God, the Mighty, the Great. I do not say this to exonerate myself. God knows that I have only said it to make your heart firm and steadfast."

"Praise be to God who has made you act according to what He likes and according to what I like. Come close to me, my son, that I may smell and feel your body for this might be the last meeting with you."

'Abdullāh knelt before her. She hugged him and smothered his head, his face and his neck with kisses. Her hands began to squeeze his body when suddenly she

withdrew them and asked:

"What is this you are wearing, 'Abdullāh?"

"This is my armour plate."

"This, my son, is not the dress of one who desires martyrdom. Take it off. That will make your movements lighter and quicker. Wear instead the *sirwāl* (a long under garment) so that if you are killed your 'awrah will not be exposed."

'Abdullāh took off his armour plate and put on the *sirwāl*. As he left for the Ḥaram to join the fighting he said: "My mother, don't deprive me of your *du'ā'* (prayer)."

Raising her hands to heaven, she prayed:

"O Lord, have mercy on his staying up for long hours and his loud crying in the darkness of the night while people slept..."

"O Lord, have mercy on his hunger and his thirst on his journeys from Madīnah and Makkah while he fasted..."

"O Lord, bless his righteousness to his mother and his father..."

"O Lord, I commend him to Your cause and I am pleased with whatever You decree for him. And grant me for his sake the reward of those who are patient and who persevere."

By sunset, 'Abdullāh was dead. Just over ten days later, his mother joined him. She was a hundred years old. Age had not made her infirm nor blunted the keenness of her mind.



'Abdullāh ibn Hudhafāh

History would have by-passed this man as it had bypassed thousands of Arabs before him. He, like them, would have had no claim to attention or fame. The greatness of Islam, however, gave to 'Abdullāh ibn Hudhafāh the opportunity to meet a world potentate of his time - Khusraw Parvez, the King of Persia and a Byzantine ruler.

The story of his encounter with Khusraw Parvez began in the sixth year of the hijrah when the Prophet decided to send some of his companions with letters to rulers outside the Arabian peninsula inviting them to Islam.

The Prophet attached great importance to this initiative. These messengers were going to distant lands with whom there was no agreement or treaty. They did not know the languages of these lands nor anything about the ways and disposition of their rulers. They were to invite these rulers to give up their religion and forsake their power and glory and enter the religion of a people who shortly before were almost their subjects. The mission was undoubtedly hazardous.

To make known his plan, the Prophet called his companions together and addressed them. He started by praising God and thanking Him. He then recited the

Shahādah and went on:

"I want to send some of you to the rulers of foreign lands but don't dispute with me as the Israelites disputed with Jesus, the son of Mary."

"O Prophet of God, we shall carry out whatever you wish," they responded. "Send us wherever you desire."

The Prophet commissioned six of his Ṣaḥābah to carry his letters to Arab and foreign rulers. One of these was 'Abdullāh ibn Hudhafāh. He was chosen to take the Prophet's letter to Khusraw Parvez, the Persian king.

'Abdullāh got his camel ready and bade farewell to his wife and son. He set out, alone, and traversed mountains and valleys until he reached the land of the Persians.

He sought permission to enter into the king's presence informing the guards of the letter he was carrying. Khusraw Parvez thereupon ordered his audience chamber to be made ready and summoned his prominent aides. When they had assembled he gave permission for 'Abdullāh to enter.

'Abdullāh entered and saw the Persian potentate dressed in delicate, flowing robes and wearing a great, neatly arranged turban. On 'Abdullāh was the plain, coarse clothes of the bedouin. His head though was held high and his feet were firm. The honour of Islam burned fiercely in his breast and the power of faith pulsed in his heart.

As soon as Khusraw Parvez saw him approaching he signalled to one of his men to take the letter from his hand.

"No," said 'Abdullāh. "The Prophet commanded me to hand over this letter to you directly and I shall not go against a command of the Messenger of God."

"Let him come near to me," Khusraw said to his guards

and 'Abdullāh went forward and handed over the letter. Khusraw then called an Arab clerk who originally came from Ḥirah and ordered him to open the letter in his presence and read its contents. He began reading:

"In the name of God, most Gracious, most Merciful.

From Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, to Khusraw the ruler of Persia.

Peace on whoever follows the guidance and believes in God and His Messenger and who testifies that there is none worthy of worship but God alone Who has no partner and that Muḥammad is His Servant and His Messenger.

"I invite you while praying to God (that you will respond to this invitation). I am indeed the Messenger of God to all mankind (sent) that I may warn everyone who is alive (of heart) and that the word (of God) may bear witness against all who deny the truth. If you desire to submit to God, then do submit. If you refuse, you will be accountable for the sins of the (idolatrous) Magians."

When the letter was read, the fire of anger exploded within Khusraw Parvez. His face became red and he began to perspire around the neck. He snatched the letter from the clerk's hand and began tearing it to pieces and shouted, "Does he dare to write to me like this, he who is my slave?" He was angry that the Prophet had not given him precedence in his letter. He then commanded 'Abdullāh to be expelled from his assembly.

'Abdullāh was taken away, not knowing what would happen to him. Would he be killed or would he be set free? But he did not want to wait to find out. He said, "By God, I don't care what happens to me after the letter of the Prophet has been so badly treated." He managed to get to his camel and rode off.

When Khusraw's anger had subsided he commanded that 'Abdullāh be brought before him. But 'Abdullāh was nowhere to be found. They searched for him all the way to the Arabian peninsula but found that he had gone ahead.

Back in Madīnah, 'Abdullāh told the Prophet how Khusraw had torn his letter to pieces and the Prophet's only reply was, "May God tear up his kingdom."

Meanwhile, Khusraw wrote to Bā-dhān, his deputy in the Yemen, to send two strong men to "that man who has appeared in the Ḥijāz" with orders to bring him to Persia.

Bā-dhān dispatched two of his strongest men to the Prophet and gave them a letter to him in which he was ordered to go with the two men to meet Khusraw without delay. Bā-dhān also asked the two men to get whatever information they could on the Prophet and to study his message closely.

The men set out, moving very quickly. In at-Ṭā'if they met some Quraysh traders and asked them about Muḥammad. "He is in Yathrib," they said and went on to Makkah feeling extremely happy. This was good news for them and they went around telling other Quraysh, "You will be pleased. Khusraw is out to get Muḥammad and you will be rid of his evil."

The two men meanwhile made straight for Madīnah where they met the Prophet, handed him the letter of Bā-dhān and said to him, "The king of kings, Khusraw, has written to our ruler Bā-dhān to send his men to get you. We have come to take you with us. If you come willingly, Khusraw has said that it will be good for you and he will spare you any punishment. If you refuse, you will know the power of his punishment. He has power to destroy

you and your people."

The Prophet smiled and said to them, "Go back to your mounts today and return tomorrow."

On the following day, they came to the Prophet and said to him, "Are you prepared to go with us to meet Khusraw?"

"You shall not meet Khusraw after today," replied the Prophet. "God has killed him and his son Shirwayh has taken his place on such a night and on such a month."

The two men stared in the face of the Prophet. They were completely dumb-founded.

"Do you know what you are saying?" they asked. "Shall we write about this to Bā-dhān?"

"Yes," replied the Prophet, "and say to him that my religion has informed me about what has happened to the Kingdom of Khusraw and that if he should become Muslim, I would appoint him ruler over what he now controls".

The two men returned to the Yemen and told Bā-dhān what had happened. Bā-dhān said, "If what Muḥammad has said is true, then he is a Prophet. If not then we shall see what happens to him."

Not long afterwards a letter from Shirwayh came to Bā-dhān in which he said, "I killed Khusraw because of his tyranny against our people. He regarded as lawful the killing of leaders, the capturing of their women and the expropriating of their wealth. When this my letter reaches you, take the allegiance of whoever is with you on my behalf."

As soon as Bā-dhān had read Shirwayh's letter, he threw it aside and announced his entry into Islam. The Persians with him in the Yemen also became Muslim.

That's the story of 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥudhafah's meeting with the Persian ruler. His meeting with a Byzantine ruler took place during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. It too is an astonishing story.

In the nineteenth year after the Hijrah, 'Umar dispatched an army to confront the Byzantines. In it was 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥudhāfah. News of the Muslim force reached the Byzantine ruler. He had heard of their sincerity of faith, and their willingness to sacrifice their lives in the way of God and His Prophet. He gave orders to his men to bring to him any Muslim captive they might take alive.

When the opposing forces met, 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥudhāfah fell captive to the Byzantines and he was brought before the ruler who was told, "This is one of the followers of Muḥammad." The ruler looked at 'Abdullāh for a long time. Suddenly he said, "I shall make a proposal to you."

"What is it?" asked 'Abdullāh.

"I suggest that you become a Christian. If you do this, you will be set free and I shall grant you a safe refuge."

The prisoner's reaction was furious:

"Death is preferable to me a thousand times to what you ask me to do."

"I see that you are a bold man. However, if you respond positively to what I propose to you, I will give you a share in my authority and swear you in as my aide."

The prisoner, shackled in his chains, smiled and said, "By God, if you give me all that you possess and all that the Arabs have in exchange for giving up the religion of Muḥammad, I shall not do so."

"Then I shall kill you."

"Do what you want," answered 'Abdullāh.

The ruler then had him put on a cross and ordered his

soldiers to throw spears at him, first near his hands and then near his feet, all the while telling him to accept Christianity or at least give up his religion. This he refused over and over again to do.

The ruler then had him taken down from the wooden cross. He called for a great pot to be brought. This was filled with water which was then heated under a fierce fire. He then had two other Muslim prisoners brought. One of them was thrown into the boiling water. As this was being done, the ruler turned to 'Abdullāh and invited him to renounce his religion so as to save himself and his fellow-Muslim from further torment.

This was the most terrible test that 'Abdullāh had to face up till now. But he remained firm and the ruler gave up trying. He then ordered that 'Abdullāh too be thrown into the pot. As he was being taken away he began to shed tears. The ruler thought that he had at last been broken and had him brought back to him. He once more suggested that 'Abdullāh become a Christian but to his astonishment, 'Abdullāh refused.

"Damn you! Why did you weep then?" shouted the ruler.

"I cried," said 'Abdullāh, "because I said to myself 'You will now be thrown into this pot for an hour and your soul will depart'. What I really desired then was to have as many souls as the number of hairs on my body and to have all of them thrown into this pot for the sake of God."

The tyrant then said, "Will you kiss my head? I will then set you free."

"And all the Muslim prisoners also?" asked 'Abdullāh. This the ruler agreed to do and 'Abdullāh said to

himself, "One of the enemies of God! I shall kiss his head and he shall set me and all other Muslim prisoners free. There can be no blame on me for doing this." He then went up to the ruler and kissed his forehead. All the Muslim prisoners were released and handed over to 'Abdullāh.

'Abdullāh ibn Ḥudhāfah eventually came to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and told him what had happened. 'Umar was greatly pleased and when he looked at the prisoners he said, "Every Muslim has a duty to kiss the head of 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥudhāfah and I shall start." 'Umar then got up and kissed the head of 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥudhāfah.



17

'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh

'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh was a cousin of the Prophet, some twelve years younger than he. With his younger brother 'Ubaydullāh and other relations, he was among the first persons who unhesitatingly declared their faith in the integrity of the Prophet and his mission. This was before the call to Islam was made public.

'Abdullāh was thus part of the core of an ever-increasing group of devout believers and ardent worshippers who helped sow the seeds of faith in what was to be a most hostile environment.

Years later, when the Prophet gave permission for his Companions to emigrate to Yathrib to avoid further persecution and torture from the disbelieving Quraysh, 'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh was one of the last to leave. His wife, a daughter of Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, was not in favour of migrating to Yathrib perhaps out of fear of reprisals from her father. She suggested that they should migrate elsewhere.

Emigrating was not a new experience for 'Abdullāh. He and some members of his immediate family had migrated before to Abyssinia. He was not unaware of the grave perils involved in wishing to join the Prophet and

other Muslims in Madinah. He kept his cool and made his preparations. Eventually, with his entire clan - men, women and children who had become Muslims - and with whatever possessions he could manage, he quietly slipped out of Makkah on the long journey northwards.

There was an air of desolation as they left Makkah. Their homes appeared sad and depressed as if no one had lived there before. No sound of conversation emanated from behind those silent walls.

'Abdullāh's clan was not long gone when the alerted Quraysh leaders came out and made the rounds of the districts of Makkah to find out which Muslims had left and who had remained. Among these leaders were Abū Jahl, 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah and Abū Sufyān himself. 'Utbah looked at the houses of the Jahsh family through which the dusty winds were blowing. He banged on the doors and shouted:

"The houses of the Jahsh family have become empty and are weeping for its occupants."

"Who were these people anyway," said Abū Jahl derisively, "that houses should weep for them?" And Abū Sufyān himself laid claim to the house of 'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh, sold it and disposed freely of its contents. It was the most beautiful and expensive of the houses.

Later, when 'Abdullāh heard what had happened to his house, he mentioned it to the Prophet, peace be upon him, who is reported to have said:

"Aren't you satisfied, O 'Abdullāh, with what God has given you instead, a house in Paradise?"

"Yes, Messenger of God," he replied, and became at peace with himself and completely satisfied.

'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh had scarcely settled down in Madinah when he had to undergo one of the most testing experiences. He had just begun to taste something of the good and restful life under the sponsorship of the Anṣār - after going through persecution at the hands of the Quraysh - when he had to be exposed to the severest test he had ever known in his life and carry out the most difficult assignment since becoming a Muslim.

The Prophet, as part of a new strategy of mobile defence, commissioned eight of his Companions to carry out the first military assignment in Islam. Among them was 'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh and Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ.

"I appoint as your Commander the one who can best bear hunger and thirst," said the Prophet and gave the standard to 'Abdullāh ibn Jahsh. He was thus the first person to be made Amīr over a contingent of believers.

The Prophet gave him precise instructions on the direction he should travel but did not let him know his eventual destination. He gave him a letter and said to him:

"You and your companions depart. When you have travelled two days, open your letter and see its contents. Whatever I command you in it, follow it but do not force any of your companions to proceed (further) with you."

After the expedition had been on its way for two days, 'Abdullāh opened the letter. It said, "Press on until you come to Nakhlah (between aṭ-Ṭā'if and Makkah). From there send us whatever information you gather about the Quraysh."

"We hear and we obey," exclaimed Abdullāh as he finished reading the letter. Then he spoke to his colleagues:

"The Prophet has commanded me to proceed to Nakhlah

to observe the Quraysh and gather information on them for him. He has also commanded me not to go further with anyone of you who is against the purpose of this expedition. So whoever desires martyrdom and is in total agreement with this expedition can accompany me. Whoever is not in agreement, may turn back (without blame) for the Messenger of Allāh, may God bless him and grant him peace, has prohibited me from putting pressure on any one of you."

"At your command, O Messenger of God," they all responded. "We shall go with you, 'Abdullāh, wherever the Messenger of God has commanded."

When they had reached a place called Buhrān, Sa'd and 'Utbah ibn Ghazwān lost a camel of theirs, went in search of it and fell behind. The group pressed on until they reached Nakhlah and began to move along the mountain passes seeking information on Quraysh movements. While they were thus engaged, they saw in the distance a Quraysh caravan coming from the direction of aṭ-Ṭā'if. There were four men in the caravan - 'Amr ibn al-Haḍramī, al-Hakam ibn Kaysān, 'Uthmān ibn 'Abdullāh and his brother al-Mughīrah. Two of the men belonged to clans that were most hostile to the Muslims. They were carrying merchandise for the Quraysh - skins, raisins and other usual Quraysh stock in trade.

The Quraysh caravan eventually saw them also. One of the Muslims, Wāqid ibn 'Abdullāh, kept a close watch over them. His head was shaven and when they saw him thus, they assumed that he and his companions were intending to perform 'umrah and therefore did not feel any cause for alarm.

The Ṣaḥābah conferred together about what they should

do. They were in a dilemma. It was the last day of the sacred month of Rajab. "If we were to (attack and) kill them," they agreed, "we would have killed them in the inviolable month. To do so would be to violate the sanctity of this month and expose ourselves to the wrath of all Arabs. If we leave them alone (for a short while), by tonight they would have entered the inviolable precincts of Makkah and thus be secure from us."

They continued consulting until finally they agreed to pounce on the caravan. Two of the men, al-Ḥakam and 'Uthmān, were captured, one was shot by an arrow and the fourth person escaped to Makkah.

'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh and his men took the two prisoners and the caravan back to Madinah. They went to the Prophet, peace be on him, and informed him about what they had done. The Prophet was greatly upset and strongly condemned their action.

"By God, I did not command you to fight. I only commanded you to gather information on the Quraysh and observe their movements." He granted a reprieve to the two prisoners, left the caravan alone and did not allow anyone to take a single item from it.

'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh and his men then knew that they had fallen into disgrace and felt certain that they were ruined because of their disobeying the command of the Prophet. They began to feel the pressure as their Muslim brethren censured them and avoided them whenever they passed one another. And they would say, "These went against the command of the Prophet."

Their discomfiture grew when they learnt that the Quraysh had taken the incident as a means to discredit the Prophet and denounce him among the tribes. They

Quraysh were saying: "Muḥammad has defiled the sacred month. He has shed blood in it, plundered wealth and captured men."

Imagine the extent of the sadness felt by 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh and his men at what had happened, moreso because of the acute embarrassment they had caused the Prophet. They were sorely tormented and the agony weighed heavily on them. Then came the good news that God Almighty was not displeased with what they had done and had sent down a revelation to the Prophet about this matter. Imagine their happiness! People came and embraced them, congratulating them on the good news and reciting to them what had been revealed in the Qur'ān about their action:

"They question you about fighting in the sacred month. Say: to fight therein is a grave offence; but barring (people) from the path of God, denying Him and denying access to the Sacred Mosque and driving out His people therefrom are graver in the sight of God. Moreover, torture, tumult and oppression are worse than killing." (Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2: 217).

When these verses were revealed, the Prophet's mind was eased. He took part of the caravan as spoils for the general benefit of the community and offered to ransom the two prisoners one of whom, al-Ḥakam, chose to become a Muslim. The Prophet became pleased with 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh and his men. Their expedition was certainly a major event in the early life of the Muslim community and initiated a strategy of mobile defence to safeguard the nascent but still very vulnerable state of Madinah.

The Muslims on hearing the above verses from the

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Quraysh were saying: "Muḥammad has defiled the sacred month. He has shed blood in it, plundered wealth and captured men."

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"They question you about fighting in the sacred month. Say: to fight therein is a grave offence; but barring (people) from the path of God, denying Him and denying access to the Sacred Mosque and driving out His people therefrom are graver in the sight of God. Moreover, torture, tumult and oppression are worse than killing." (Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2: 217).

When these verses were revealed, the Prophet's mind was eased. He took part of the caravan as spoils for the general benefit of the community and offered to ransom the two prisoners one of whom, al-Ḥakam, chose to become a Muslim. The Prophet became pleased with 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh and his men. Their expedition was certainly a major event in the early life of the Muslim community and initiated a strategy of mobile defence to safeguard the nascent but still very vulnerable state of Madīnah.

The Muslims on hearing the above verses from the

Qur'ān were now eager to actively defend themselves and asked the Prophet, "Do you desire that we should have a military campaign?" The reply came in the verse of the Qur'ān:

"Indeed those who have believed, those who have undertaken the hijrah and those who strive in the path of God, they are the ones who have hope in the grace of God. And God is Forgiving, most Merciful." (Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2: 218).

The Battle of Badr followed. 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh fought in it and was put to a great test, but a test to which his faith was equal.

Then came the fateful Battle of Uḥud. Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, his friend, has related that during the battle, 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh came to him and said:

"Aren't you making a du'ā' to God?"

They moved aside and Sa'd prayed:

"Lord and Sustainer! When I meet the enemy, let me meet a man of enormous strength and fury. I shall fight him and he shall fight me. Then grant me victory over him until I slay him and acquire his spoils."

To this prayer, 'Abdullāh said "Āmīn" and then he himself prayed:

"Lord, grant that I meet a man of great standing and enormous fury. I shall fight him for Your sake, and he shall fight me. He shall take me and cut off my nose and ears and when I meet You on the morrow, You will say, 'For what were your nose and ear cut off?' And I will say, 'For Your sake and for the sake of Your Prophet.' And then You will say: 'You have spoken the truth.'"

Sa'd told this story to his son and said:

"The prayer of 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh was better than

mine. I saw him at the end of the day. (He was killed and his body was mutilated)."

In fact 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh was struck down not far from the uncle of the Prophet, Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and his body too was horribly mutilated. When the noble Prophet saw what had been done to them, he was appalled and angered but yet he expressly forbade mutilation of the fallen in battle. In a single grave, he buried the two men and his tears watered the earth where they were put to rest.



Mu'ādh ibn Jabal

Mu'ādh ibn Jabal was a young man growing up in Yathrib as the light of guidance and truth began to spread over the Arabian peninsula. He was a handsome and imposing character with black eyes and curly hair and immediately impressed whoever he met. He was already distinguished for the sharpness of his intelligence among young men of his own age.

The young Mu'ādh became a Muslim at the hands of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, the *dā'ī* (missionary) whom the Prophet had sent to Yathrib before the hijrah. Mu'ādh was among the seventy-two Yathribites who journeyed to Makkah, one year before the hijrah, and met the Prophet at his house and later again in the valley of Mina, outside Makkah, at 'Aqabah. Here the famous second 'Aqabah Pledge was made at which the new Muslims of Yathrib, including some women, vowed to support and defend the Prophet at any cost. Mu'ādh was among those who enthusiastically clasped the hands of the blessed Prophet then and pledged allegiance to him.

As soon as Mu'ādh returned to Madīnah from Makkah, he and a few others of his age formed a group to remove and destroy idols from the houses of the *mushrikīn* in

Yathrib. One of the effects of this campaign was that a prominent man of the city, 'Amr ibn al-Jamūh, became a Muslim.

When the noble Prophet reached Madīnah, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal stayed in his company as much as possible. He studied the Qur'ān and the laws of Islam until he became one of the most well-versed of all the companions in the religion of Islam.

Wherever Mu'ādh went, people would refer to him for legal judgments on matters over which they differed. This is not strange since he was brought up in the school of the Prophet himself and learnt as much as he could from him. He was an outstanding pupil of the best teacher. His knowledge bore the stamp of authenticity. The best certificate that he could have received came from the Prophet himself when he said:

"The most knowledgeable of my *ummah* in matters of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* is Mu'ādh ibn Jabal."

One of the greatest of Mu'ādh's contributions to the *ummah* of Muḥammad was that he was one of the group of six who collected the Qur'ān during the lifetime of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Whenever a group of companions met and Mu'ādh was among them, they would look at him with awe and respect on account of his knowledge. The Prophet and his two Khalīfahs after him placed this unique gift and power in the service of Islam.

After the liberation of Makkah, the Quraysh became Muslims en masse. The Prophet immediately saw the need of the new Muslims for teachers to instruct them in the fundamentals of Islam and to make them truly understand the spirit and letter of its laws. He appointed 'Attāb ibn Usayd as his deputy in Makkah and he asked Mu'ādh ibn

Jabal to stay with him and teach people the Qur'ān and instruct them in the religion.

Sometime after the Prophet had returned to Madīnah, messengers of the kings of Yemen came to him announcing that they and the people of Yemen had become Muslims. They requested that some teachers should be sent with them to teach Islam to the people. For this task the Prophet commissioned a group of competent *du'āt* (missionaries) and made Mu'ādh ibn Jabal their *amīr*. He then put the following questions to Mu'ādh:

"According to what will you judge?"

"According to the Book of God," replied Mu'ādh.

"And if you find nothing therein?"

"According to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of God."

"And if you find nothing therein?"

"Then I will exert myself (exercise *ijtihād*) to form my own judgment."

The Prophet was pleased with this reply and said:

"Praise be to God Who has guided the messenger of the Prophet to that which pleases the Prophet."

The Prophet personally bade farewell to this mission of guidance and light and walked for some distance alongside Mu'ādh as he rode out of the city. He gave this advice:

"Facilitate things for the people and do not make things difficult for them. Give the people good tidings and do not repulse them."

Finally he said to him:

"O Mu'ādh, perhaps you shall not meet me again after this year. Perhaps when you return you shall see only my mosque and my grave." Mu'ādh wept. Those with him wept too. A feeling of sadness and desolation overtook

him as he parted from his beloved Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him. But as he turned to face Madīnah, the noble Prophet said, "The nearest to me are the pious, wherever they are and whenever they are."

The Prophet's premonition was correct. The eyes of Mu'ādh never beheld the Prophet after that moment. The Prophet died before Mu'ādh returned from the Yemen. There is no doubt that Mu'ādh wept when he returned to Madīnah and found there was no longer the blessed company of the Prophet. 'Umar saw Mu'ādh weeping at the Prophet's grave and recalling his advice.

During the caliphate of 'Umar, Mu'ādh was sent to the Banū Kilāb to apportion their stipends and to distribute the *ṣadaqah* of their richer folk among the poor. When he had done his duty, he returned to his wife with his saddle blanket around his neck, empty handed, and she asked him:

"Where are the gifts which commissioners return with for their families?"

"I had an alert Supervisor who was checking over me," he replied.

"You were a trusted person with the Messenger of God and with Abū Bakr. Then 'Umar came and he sent a supervisor with you to check on you!" she exclaimed. She went on to talk about this to the women of 'Umar's household and complained to them about it. The complaint eventually reached 'Umar, so he summoned Mu'ādh and said:

"Did I send a supervisor with you to check on you?"

"No, *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*," he said, "But that was the only reason I could find to give her." 'Umar laughed and

then gave him a gift, saying:

"I hope this pleases you."

Also during the caliphate of 'Umar, the governor of Syria, Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān sent a message saying:

"O Amīr al-Mu'minīn! The people of Syria are many. They fill the towns. They need people to teach them the Qur'ān and instruct them in the religion."

'Umar thereupon summoned five persons who had collected the Qur'ān in the lifetime of the Prophet, peace be upon him. They were Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, 'Ubādah ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and Abū d-Dardā'. He said to them:

"Your brothers in Syria have asked me to help them by sending those who can teach them the Qur'ān and instruct them in the religion. Please appoint three among you for this task and may God bless you. I can select three of you myself if you do not want choose."

"Why should we choose?" they asked. "Abū Ayyūb is quite old and Ubayy is a sick man. That leaves three of us."

"All three of you go to Ḥimṣ first of all. If you are satisfied with the condition of the people there, one of you should stay there, another should go to Damascus and the other to Palestine."

So it was that 'Ubādah ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit was left at Ḥimṣ, Abū ad-Dardā' went to Damascus and Mu'ādh went to Palestine. In the short time that he was in this region, Mu'ādh gained the affection of people. Someone called Abū Idrīs al-Khawlānī has testified to this. He said:

"I entered the Damascus mosque and there was a man with a beautiful mouth and white teeth sitting with some

people. When they disagreed about something, they referred to him... I enquired about him and it was said, 'This is Mu'ādh ibn Jabal.'

"The next day I went to the Zuhṛ Prayer and I found that he had preceded me to the Zuhṛ Prayer and found him praying.

"Then I came to him from in front of him, greeted him and said, 'By Allāh, I love you for the sake of Allāh.' He said, 'By Allāh?' I said, 'By Allāh!' (This exchange was repeated twice.)

"He (Mu'ādh) then said (to me): 'Rejoice! For I heard the Messenger of Allāh, peace be on him, speaking Divine words: My love is bound for those who love each other for My sake, those who sit with each other for My sake, those who visit each other for My sake, and those who give to each other generously for My sake.'"

And on the subject of love, Mu'ādh had once asked the noble Prophet:

"Which faith is most excellent?"

He replied:

"That you love (any person or thing) for the sake of God, dislike for the sake of God, and that you keep your tongue busy in the remembrance of God."

Mu'ādh then asked:

"Messenger of God, is there anything besides this?"

He said:

"You should like for the people what you like for yourself and you should dislike for them what you dislike for yourself."

In Palestine, Mu'ādh fell ill with an infectious disease. As he was near to death, he turned in the direction of the Ka'bah and repeated this refrain: "Welcome Death,

Welcome. A visitor has come after a long absence..."

And looking up to heaven, he said:

"O Lord, You know that I did not desire the world and to prolong my stay in it... O Lord, accept my soul with goodness as you would accept a believing soul..."

He then passed away, far from his family and his clan but among people who loved him, a *dā'i* in the service of God and a *muhājir* in His path.



19

Thumāmah ibn Uthāl

In the sixth year after the hijrah, the Prophet, may the blessings of God be on him, decided to expand the scope of his mission. He sent eight letters to rulers in the Arabian peninsula and surrounding areas inviting them to Islam. One of these rulers was Thumāmah ibn Uthāl.

Thumāmah was one of the most powerful Arab rulers in pre-Qur'anic times. This is not surprising since he was a chieftain of the Banū Ḥanīfah and one of the rulers of al-Yamāmah whose word no one dared to challenge or disobey.

When Thumāmah received the Prophet's letter, he was consumed by anger and rejected it. He refused to listen to the invitation of Truth and goodness. More than that, he felt a strong desire to go and kill the Prophet and bury his mission with him.

Thumāmah waited and waited for a convenient time to carry out his design against the Prophet until eventually forgetfulness caused him to lose interest. One of his uncles, however, reminded him of his plan, praising what he intended to do.

In the pursuit of his evil design against the Prophet, Thumāmah met and killed a group of the Prophet's

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companions. The Prophet thereupon declared him a wanted man who could lawfully be killed on sight.

Not long afterwards, Thumāmah decided to perform *'umrah*. He wanted to perform *ṭawāf* around the Ka'bah and sacrifice to the idols there. So he left al-Yamāmah for Makkah. As he was passing near Madīnah, an incident took place which he had not anticipated.

Groups of Muslims were patrolling the districts of Madīnah and outlying areas on the lookout for any strangers or anyone intent on causing trouble. One of these groups came upon Thumāmah and apprehended him but they did not know who he was. They took him to Madīnah and tied him to one of the columns in the mosque. They waited for the Prophet himself to question the man and decide what should be done with him.

When the Prophet was about to enter the mosque, he saw Thumāmah and asked his companions, "Do you know whom you have taken?"

"No, Messenger of God," they replied.

"This is Thumāmah ibn Uthāl al-Ḥanafī," he said. "You have done well in capturing him."

The Prophet then returned home to his family and said, "Get what food you can and send it to Thumāmah ibn Uthāl." He then ordered his camel to be milked for him. All this was done before he met Thumāmah or had spoken to him.

The Prophet then approached Thumāmah hoping to encourage him to become a Muslim. "What do you have to say for yourself?" he asked.

"If you want to kill in reprisal," Thumāmah replied, "you can have someone of noble blood to kill. If, out of your bounty, you want to forgive, I shall be grateful. If

you want money in compensation, I shall give you whatever amount you ask."

The Prophet then left him for two days, but still personally sent him food and drink and milk from his camel. The Prophet went back to him and asked, "What do you have to say for yourself?" Thumāmah repeated what he had said the day before. The Prophet then left and came back to him the following day. "What do you have to say for yourself?" he asked again and Thumāmah repeated what he had said once more. Then the Prophet turned to his companions and said, "Set him free."

Thumāmah left the mosque of the Prophet and rode until he came to a palm grove near al-Baqī' (a place of luxuriant vegetation which later became a cemetery for many of the Prophet's companions). He watered his camel and washed himself well. Then he turned back and made his way to the Prophet's mosque. There, he stood before a congregation of Muslims and said:

"I bear witness that there is no god but Allāh and I bear witness that Muḥammad is His Servant and His Messenger."

He then went to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and said:

"O Muḥammad, by God, there was never on this earth a face more detestable than yours. Now, yours is the dearest face of all to me."

"I have killed some of your men," he continued, "I am at your mercy. What will you have done to me?"

"There is now no blame on you, Thumāmah," replied the Prophet. "Becoming a Muslim obliterates past actions and marks a new beginning."

Thumāmah was greatly relieved. His face showed his

surprise and joy and he vowed, "By God, I shall place my whole self, my sword, and whoever is with me at your service and at the service of your religion."

"O Rasūlullāh," he went on, "when your horsemen captured me I was on my way to perform 'umrah. What do you think I should do now?"

"Go ahead and perform your 'umrah," replied the Prophet, "but perform it according to the laws of God and His Messenger." The Prophet then taught him how to perform 'umrah according to Islamic rules.

Thumāmah left to fulfil his intention. When he reached the valley of Makkah, he began shouting in a loud, resonant voice:

"Labbayk Allāhumma labbayk.

Labbayka lā sharīka laka labbayk.

Innal ḥamda wa-n ni'mata laka wa-l mulk

Lā sharīka lak.

(Here I am at Your command O Lord, Here I am.

Here I am. No partner have You. Here I am.

All praise, bounty and dominion belong to You.

No partner have You.")

He was thus the first Muslim to enter Makkah reciting the *talbīyah* and this powerful refrain has continued to reverberate through the centuries in the hallowed land.

The Quraysh heard the sound of the *talbīyah* and felt both anger and alarm. With drawn swords, they set out towards the voice to punish the one who had thus assaulted their preserve. As they came closer to him, Thumāmah raised his voice even higher while reciting the *talbīyah* and looked upon them with pride and defiance. One of the Quraysh young men was particularly incensed and was about to shoot Thumāmah with an arrow when the

others grabbed his hand and shouted:

"Woe to you! Do you know who this is? He is Thumāmah ibn Uthāl, ruler of al-Yamāmah. By God, if you should harm him, his people would cut our supplies, with dire consequences for us."

Swords were replaced in their scabbards as the Quraysh went up to Thumāmah and said:

"What's wrong with you, Thumāmah? Have you given in and abandoned your religion and the religion of your forefathers?"

"I have not given in," he replied, "but I have decided to follow the best religion. I follow the religion of Muḥammad."

He then went on: "I swear to you by the Lord of this House that after my return to al-Yamāmah, no grain of wheat or any of its produce shall reach you until you follow Muḥammad."

Under the watchful eyes of the Quraysh, Thumāmah performed 'umrah as the Prophet, peace be upon him, had instructed him. He dedicated his sacrifice to God alone.

Thumāmah returned to his land and ordered his people to withhold supplies from the Quraysh. The boycott gradually began to have effect and became more and more stringent. Prices began to rise. Hunger began to bite and there was even fear of death among the Quraysh. Thereupon, they wrote to the Prophet, saying:

"Our agreement with you (the treaty of Ḥudaybiyah) is that you should maintain the bonds of kinship but you have gone against that. You have cut the bonds of kinship. You have killed and caused death through hunger. Thumāmah ibn Uthāl has cut our supplies and inflicted

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harm on us. Perhaps you would see fit to instruct him to resume sending us what we need."

The Prophet immediately sent a messenger instructing Thumāmah to lift the boycott and resume supplies to the Quraysh. This Thumāmah did.

Thumāmah spent the rest of his life in the service of his religion, abiding by the undertaking he had given to the Prophet. When the Prophet died, many Arabs began leaving the religion of God in great numbers. Musaylamah, the impostor, began calling the Banū Ḥanīfah to believe in him as a Prophet. Thumāmah confronted him and said to his people:

"O Banū Ḥanīfah, beware of this grievous matter. There is no light or guidance in it. By God, it will only bring distress and suffering to whoever joins this movement and misfortune even to those who do not join.

"O Banū Ḥanīfah, two Prophets do not come at the same time and there shall be no Prophet after Muḥammad and no Prophet to share in his mission."

He then read out to them the following verses of the Qur'ān:

"Hā Mīm. The revelation of this Book is from God the Almighty, the all-Knowing. He forgives sins and accepts repentance. He is severe in punishment and has a long reach. There is no god except Him. To Him is the journey's end." (*Sūrah Ghāfir*, 40: 1-3).

"Can you compare these words of God with the uttering of Musaylamah?" he asked.

He then gathered together all those who had remained in Islam and began to wage a *jihād* against the apostates and to make the word of God supreme. The loyal Muslims of Banū Ḥanīfah needed additional help to stand against

the armies of Musaylamah. Their arduous task was completed by the forces dispatched by Abū Bakr but at the cost of many a Muslim life.

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20

Zayd al-Khayr

People are made up of basic "metals" or qualities. The best of them in *Jāhiliyah* are the best of them in Islam, according to a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet.

Here are two pictures of a noble companion - one during his life in *Jāhiliyah* and the other after he became a Muslim.

In the former period, he was known as Zayd al-Khayl meaning Zayd of the Horses. When he became a Muslim, the Prophet renamed him Zayd al-Khayr meaning Zayd the Good.

The tribe of 'Āmir were afflicted one year by a severe drought which destroyed crops and vegetation and caused livestock to perish. So bad was it that one man left the tribe with his family and went to Ḥirah. There he left his family with the words, "Wait for me here till I return to you." He swore to himself not to return to them until he earned some money for them or died in the process.

The man took some provisions with him and walked all day in search of something for his family. At nightfall, he found himself in front of a tent. Nearby, a horse was tethered and he said to himself:

"This is the first booty." He went to the horse, untied it and was about to mount it when a voice called out to him:

"Leave it and take your life as booty." He hastily abandoned the horse.

For seven days he walked until he reached a place where there was a pasture for camels. Nearby was an enormous tent with a leather dome, signs of great riches and wealth.

The man said to himself: "Doubtless this pasture has camels and doubtless this tent has occupants." The sun was about to set. The man looked inside the tent and saw a very old man in the centre. He sat down behind the old man without the latter realizing his presence.

The sun soon set. A horseman, imposing and well built, approached. He rode his mount erect and tall. Two male servants accompanied him, one on his right and the other on his left. With him were almost a hundred she-camels and in front of them a huge male camel. Clearly he was a well-endowed man. To one of the servants he said, pointing to a fat camel:

"Milk this and give the old man a drink." The shaykh drank one or two mouthfuls from the full vessel which was brought to him and left it. The wanderer went up to it stealthily and drank all the milk in it. The servant returned, took the vessel and said:

"Master, he has drunk it all!" The horseman was happy and ordered another camel to be milked. The old man drank only one mouthful and the wanderer drank half of what was left so as not to arouse the suspicion of the horseman. The horseman then ordered his second servant to kill a sheep. Some of it was grilled and the horseman

fed the shaykh until he was satisfied. He and the two servants then ate. After this, they all slept soundly and their snoring filled the tent.

The wanderer then went to the he-camel, untied and mounted it. He rode off and the she camels followed. He rode throughout the night. At daybreak he looked around in every direction but did not see anyone following him. He pushed on until the sun was high in the sky. He looked around and suddenly saw something like an eagle or a big bird in the distance coming towards him. It quickly gained on him and soon he saw that it was the horseman on his horse.

The wanderer dismounted and tied the he-camel. He took out an arrow and placed it in his bow and stood in front of the other camels. The horseman stopped at a distance and shouted:

"Untie the camel." The man refused saying how he had left behind him a hungry family in Ḥirah and how he had sworn not to return unless he had money or died in the process.

"You are dead if you do not untie the camel," said the horseman. The wanderer again refused to do so. The horseman threatened him once more and said:

"Hold out the reins of the camel. There are three knots in it. Tell me in which of them you want me to place my arrow." The man pointed to the middle knot and the horseman lodged an arrow right in the centre as if he had neatly placed it there with his hand. He did the same with the second and third knots. At that, the man quietly returned his own arrow to his quiver and gave himself up. The horseman took away his sword and his bow and said to him:

"Ride behind me." The man expected the worst fate to befall him now. He was at the complete mercy of the horseman who said:

"Do you think I will cause you harm when you have shared with Muhalhil (the old man, his father) his drink and his food last night?"

When the man heard the name Muhalhil, he was astonished and asked:

"Are you Zayd al-Khayl?"

"Yes," said the horseman.

"Be the best captor," pleaded the man.

"Don't worry," replied Zayd al-Khayl calmly. "If these camels were mine, I would give them to you. But they belong to one of my sisters. But stay some days with me. I am about to make a raid."

Three days later he raided the Banū Numayr and captured about a hundred camels. He gave them all to the man and sent some men with him as guards until he reached his family in Ḥirah.

The above is a story of Zayd al-Khayl as he was in Jāhiliyah recounted by the historian ash-Shaybānī. The books of *Siyar* give another picture of Zayd al-Khayl as he was in Islam...

When Zayd al-Khayr heard the news of the Prophet, peace be upon him, he made some of his own enquiries and then decided to go to Madīnah to meet the Prophet. With him was a big delegation of his people among whom were Zurr ibn Sadūs, Mālik ibn Jubayr, 'Āmir ibn Juwayn and others.

When they reached Madīnah, they went straight to the Prophet's Mosque and tethered their mounts at its door. It

happened that as they entered, the Prophet was on the mimbar addressing the Muslims. His speech aroused Zayd and his delegation and they were also astonished by the rapt attention of the Muslims and the effect of the Prophet's words on them. The Prophet was saying:

"I am better for you than al-'Uzza (one of the main idols of the Arabs in Jāhiliyah) and everything else that you worship. I am better for you than the black camel which you worship besides God."

The Prophet's words had two different effects on Zayd al-Khayl and those with him. Some of them responded positively to the Truth and accepted it. Some turned away and rejected it. One of the latter was Zurr ibn Sadūs. When he saw the devotion of the believers to Muḥammad, both envy and fear filled his heart and he said to those with him:

"I see a man who shall certainly captivate all Arabs and bring them under his sway. I shall not let him control me ever." He then headed towards Syria where it is said he shaved his head (as was the practice of some monks) and became a Christian.

The reaction of Zayd and others was different. When the Prophet had finished speaking, Zayd stood up, tall and impressive-looking in the midst of the Muslims and said in a loud and clear voice:

"O Muḥammad, I testify that there is no god but Allāh and that you are the Messenger of Allāh."

The Prophet came up to him and asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Zayd al-Khayl, the son of Muḥalhil."

"From now on you are Zayd al-Khayr instead, not Zayd al-Khayl," said the Prophet. And he added: "Praise be to

God Who has brought you from the hills and dales of your native land and softened your heart towards Islam." Thereafter he was known as Zayd al-Khayr.

The Prophet then took him to his house. With them were 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and some other companions. The Prophet gave him a cushion to sit on but he felt very uncomfortable to recline thus in the presence of the Prophet and he returned the cushion. The Prophet handed it back to him and he returned it to him. This happened three times. Eventually, when they were all seated, the Prophet said to Zayd al-Khayr:

"O Zayd, no man has ever been described to me and when I see him he does not fit the description at all except you. You have two characteristics which are pleasing to God and His Prophet."

"What are they?" asked Zayd.

"Perseverance and sagacity," replied the Prophet.

"Praise be to God," said Zayd, "Who has given me what He and His Prophet like." He then turned directly to the Prophet and said:

"Give me, O Messenger of God, three hundred horsemen and I promise you that I will secure Byzantine territory with them."

The Prophet praised his fervour and said, "What manner of man are you!"

During this visit, all those who stayed with Zayd became Muslims. They then desired to return to their homes in Najd and the Prophet bade them farewell. The great desire of Zayd al-Khayr to work and struggle for the cause of Islam, however, was not to be realized.

In Madinah al-Munawwarah at that time there was an epidemic of fever and Zayd al-Khayr succumbed to it.

"Take me away from the land of Qays," he said to his companions. "I have the fever of small-pox. By God, I shall not fight as a Muslim before I meet God Almighty."

Zayd took the road to his people in Najd in spite of the fact that the fever became more and more intense and slowed him down. He hoped at least to get back to his people and that they would become Muslims, through God's grace, at his hands. He struggled to overcome the fever but it got the better of him and he breathed his last on the way before reaching Najd.

Between his acceptance of Islam and his death, there was no time for Zayd al-Khayr to have fallen into sin.



21

'Abdullāh ibn Salām

Al-Ḥuṣayn ibn Salām was a Jewish rabbi in Yathrib who was widely respected and honoured by the people of the city, even by those who were not Jewish. He was known for his piety and goodness, his upright conduct and his truthfulness.

Al-Ḥuṣayn lived a peaceful and gentle life but he was serious, purposeful and organized in the way he spent his time. For a fixed period each day, he would worship, teach and preach in the temple. Then he would spend some time in his orchard, looking after date palms, pruning and pollinating. Thereafter, to increase his understanding and knowledge of his religion, he would devote himself to the study of the Torah.

In this study, it is said, he was particularly struck by some verses of the Torah which dealt with the coming of a Prophet who would complete the message of previous Prophets. Al-Ḥuṣayn therefore took an immediate and keen interest when he heard reports of the appearance of a Prophet in Makkah. He said:

"When I heard of the appearance of the Messenger of God, peace be on him, I began to make enquiries about his name, his genealogy, his characteristics, his time and

place and I began to compare this information with what is contained in our books. From these enquiries, I became convinced about the authenticity of his prophethood and I affirmed the truth of his mission. However, I concealed my conclusions from the Jews. I held my tongue...

Then came the day when the Prophet, peace be on him, left Makkah and headed for Yathrib. When he reached Yathrib and stopped at Qubā', a man came rushing into the city, calling out to people and announcing the arrival of the Prophet. At that moment, I was at the top of a palm tree doing some work. My aunt, Khālidah bint al-Hārith, was sitting under the tree. On hearing the news, I shouted:

'*Allāhu Akbar! Allāhu Akbar!* (God is Great! God is Great!')

When my aunt heard my *takbīr*, she remonstrated with me:

'May God frustrate you! By God, if you had heard that Moses was coming you would not have been more enthusiastic.'

'Auntie, he is really, by God, the 'brother' of Moses and follows his religion. He was sent with the same mission as Moses.'

She was silent for a while and then said:

'Is he the Prophet about whom you spoke to us who would be sent to confirm the truth preached by previous (Prophets) and complete the message of his Lord?'

'Yes,' I replied.

Without any delay or hesitation, I went out to meet the Prophet. I saw crowds of people at his door. I moved about in the crowds until I reached close to him. The first words I heard him say were:

'O people! Spread peace and share food. Pray during the night while people (normally) sleep and you will enter Paradise in peace.'

I looked at him closely. I scrutinized him and was convinced that his face was not that of an imposter. I went closer to him and made the declaration of faith that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh.

The Prophet turned to me and asked:

'What is your name?'

'Al-Ḥuṣayn ibn Salām,' I replied.

'Instead, it is (now) 'Abdullāh ibn Salām,' he said (giving me a new name).

'Yes,' I agreed. 'Abdullāh ibn Salām (it shall be). By Him who has sent you with the Truth, I do not wish to have another name after this day.'

I returned home and introduced Islam to my wife, my children and the rest of my household. They all accepted Islam including my aunt Khālidah who was then an old lady. However, I advised them then to conceal our acceptance of Islam from the Jews until I gave them permission. They agreed.

Subsequently, I went back to the Prophet, peace be on him, and said:

'O Messenger of God! The Jews are a people (inclined to) slander and falsehood. I want you to invite their most prominent men to meet you. (During the meeting however), you should keep me concealed from them in one of your rooms. Ask them then about my status among them before they find out of my acceptance of Islam. Then invite them to Islam. If they were to know that I have become a Muslim, they would denounce me and

accuse me of everything base and slander me.'

The Prophet kept me in one of his rooms and invited the prominent Jewish personalities to visit him. He introduced Islam to them and urged them to have faith in God. They began to dispute and argue with him about the Truth. When he realized that they were not inclined to accept Islam, he put the question to them:

'What is the status of Al-Ḥuṣayn ibn Salām among you?'

'He is our *sayyid* (leader) and the son of our *sayyid*. He is our *rabbi* and our *ʿālim* (scholar), the son of our *rabbi* and *ʿālim*.'

'If you come to know that he has accepted Islam, would you accept Islam also?' asked the Prophet.

'God forbid! He would not accept Islam. May God protect him from accepting Islam,' they said (horrified).

At this point I came out in full view of them and announced:

'O assembly of Jews! Be conscious of God and accept what Muḥammad has brought. By God, you certainly know that he is the Messenger of God and you can find prophecies about him and mention of his name and characteristics in your Torah. I for my part declare that he is the Messenger of God. I have faith in him and believe that he is true. I know him.'

'You are a liar,' they shouted. 'By God, you are evil and ignorant, the son of an evil and ignorant person.' And they continued to heap every conceivable abuse on me..."

'Abdullāh ibn Salām approached Islam with a soul thirsty for knowledge. He was passionately devoted to the Qur'ān and spent much time reciting and studying its

beautiful and sublime verses. He was deeply attached to the noble Prophet and was constantly in his company.

Much of his time he spent in the masjid, engaged in worship, in learning and in teaching. He was known for his sweet, moving and effective way of teaching study circles of Ṣaḥābah who assembled regularly in the Prophet's mosque.

'Abdullāh ibn Salām was known among the Ṣaḥābah as a man from "*ahl-al-Jannah*" - the people of Paradise. This was because of his determination on the advice of the Prophet to hold steadfastly to the "most trustworthy handhold" that is belief in and total submission to God.



Muhammad ibn Maslamah

Black, tall and sturdy, Muhammad ibn Maslamah towered above his contemporaries. He was a giant among the companions of the Prophet, a giant in body and a giant in deeds.

Significantly he was called Muhammad even before he became a Muslim. It would seem that his name was itself a pointer to the fact that he was among the first of the Yathribites to become a Muslim and to follow the teachings of the great Prophet. (The name Muhammad was practically unknown at the time but since the Prophet encouraged Muslims to name themselves after him, it has become one of the most widely used names in the world.)

Muhammad ibn Maslamah was a *ḥalīf* or an ally of the Aws tribe in Madinah indicating that he himself was not an Arab. He became a Muslim at the hands of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, the first missionary sent out by the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah. He accepted Islam even before men like Usayd ibn Ḥudayr and Sa'd ibn Mu'adh who were influential men in the city.

When the Prophet, peace be on him, came to Madinah, he adopted the unique method of strengthening the bonds of brotherhood between the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār. He

paired off each Muhājir with one of the Anṣār. This arrangement also helped to relieve the immediate needs of the Muhājirīn for shelter and food and created an integrated community of believers.

The Prophet was a keen observer of character and temperament and was concerned to join in brotherhood persons of similar attitudes and tastes. He joined in brotherhood Muhammad ibn Maslamah and Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ. Like Abū 'Ubaydah, Muhammad ibn Maslamah was quiet and pensive and had a strong sense of trust and devotion. He was also brave and resolute in action. He was a distinguished horseman who performed feats of heroism and sacrifice in the service of Islam.

Muhammad ibn Maslamah took part in all the military engagements of the Prophet except the expedition to Tabūk. On that occasion, he and 'Alī were put in charge of an army which was left behind to protect Madinah. Later in life, he would often relate scenes of these battles to his ten children.

There are many instances in the life of Muhammad ibn Maslamah which showed what a dependable and trustworthy person he was. Before the start of hostilities at the Battle of Uḥud, the Prophet and the Muslim force numbering some seven hundred persons spent a night in an open camp. He put fifty men under the command of Muhammad ibn Maslamah and entrusted him with the task of patrolling the camp the whole night. During the battle itself, after the disastrous rout of the Muslims by the Quraysh during which about seventy Muslims lost their lives and many fled in every possible direction, a small band of the faithful bravely defended the Prophet till the tide of battle turned. Muhammad ibn Maslamah



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was among them.

Muḥammad ibn Maslamah was quick to respond to the call of action. He once stood listening to the Prophet as he spoke to the Muslims about the designs of some of the Jewish leaders in the region.

At the beginning of his stay in Madīnah, the Prophet had concluded an agreement with the Jews of the city which said in part:

"The Jews who attach themselves to our commonwealth shall be protected from all insults and harassment. They shall have equal rights as our own people to our assistance... They shall join the Muslims in defending Madīnah against all enemies... They shall not declare war nor enter any treaty or agreement against the Muslims."

Jewish leaders had violated this agreement by encouraging the Quraysh and tribes around Madīnah in their designs against the state. They were also bent on creating discord among the people of Madīnah in order to weaken the influence of Islam.

After the resounding victory of the Muslims over the Quraysh at the Battle of Badr, one of the three main Jewish groups in Madīnah, the Banū Qaynuqā' was especially furious and issued a petulant challenge to the Prophet. They said:

"O Muḥammad! You really think that we are like your people (the Quraysh)? Don't be deceived. You confronted a people who have no knowledge of war and you took the chance to rout them. If you were to fight against us you would indeed know that we are men."

They thus spurned their agreement with the Prophet and issued an open challenge to fight. The Qaynuqā' however were goldsmiths who dominated the market in

Madīnah. They were depending on their allies, the Khazraj, to help them in their declared war. The Khazraj refused. The Prophet placed the Banū Qaynuqā's quarters under a siege which lasted for fifteen nights. The fainthearted Qaynuqā' finally decided to surrender and ask the Prophet for a free passage out of Madīnah.

The Prophet allowed them to leave and the tribe - men, women and children - left unharmed. They had to leave behind them their arms and their goldsmith's equipment. They settled down at Adhra'at in Syria.

The departure of the Qaynuqā' did not end Jewish feelings of animosity towards the Prophet although the non-aggression agreement was still in force. One of those who was consumed with hatred against the Prophet and the Muslims and who openly gave vent to his rage was Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf.

Ka'b's father was in fact an Arab who had fled to Madīnah after committing a crime. He became an ally of the Banū an-Naḍir, another important Jewish group, and married a Jewish lady named 'Aqilah bint Abu-l Ḥaḥiq. She was Ka'b's mother.

Ka'b was a tall and impressive looking person. He was a well-known poet and was one of the richest men among the Jews. He lived in a castle on the outskirts of Madīnah where he had extensive palm groves. He was regarded as a Jewish leader of importance throughout the Ḥijāz. He provided means of support and sponsorship to many Jewish rabbis.

Ka'b was openly hostile to Islam. He lampooned the Prophet, besmirched in verse the reputation of Muslim women, and incited the tribes in and around Madīnah against the Prophet and Islam. He was particularly

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distressed when he heard the news of the Muslim victory at Badr. When he saw the returning army with the Quraysh prisoners of war, he was bitter and furious. He took it upon himself then to make the long journey to Makkah to express his grief and to incite the Quraysh to take further revenge. He also went to other areas, from tribe to tribe, urging people to take up arms against the Prophet. News of his activities reached the Prophet, peace be on him, who prayed:

"O Lord, rid me of the son of Ashraf, however You wish."

Ka'b had become a real danger to the state of peace and mutual trust which the Prophet was struggling to achieve in Madinah.

Ka'b returned to Madinah and continued his verbal attacks on the Prophet and his abuse of Muslim women. He refused, after warnings from the Prophet, to stop his dirty campaign and sinister intrigues. He was bent on fomenting a revolt against the Prophet and the Muslims in Madinah. By all these actions, Ka'b had openly declared war against the Prophet. He was dangerous and a public enemy to the nascent Muslim state. The Prophet was quite exasperated with him and said to the Muslims:

"Who will deal with Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf? He has offended God and His Apostle."

"I shall deal with him for you, O Messenger of God," volunteered Muḥammad ibn Maslamah.

This, however, was no easy undertaking. Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, according to one report, went home and stayed for three days without either eating or drinking, just thinking about what he had to do. The Prophet heard of this, called him and asked him why he had not been

eating or drinking. He replied:

"O Messenger of God, I gave an undertaking to you but I do not know whether I can accomplish it or not."

"Your duty is only to try your utmost," replied the Prophet.

Muḥammad ibn Maslamah then went to some other companions of the Prophet and told them what he had undertaken to do. They included Abū Nā'ilah, a foster brother of Ka'b ibn al-Ahraf. They agreed to help him and he devised a plan to accomplish the mission. They went back to the Prophet to seek his approval since the plan involved enticing Ka'b from his fortress residence through some deception. The Prophet gave his consent on the principle that war involved deceit.

Both Muḥammad ibn Maslamah who was in fact a nephew of Ka'b by fosterage and Abū Nā'ilah then went to Ka'b's residence. Muḥammad ibn Maslamah was the first to speak:

"This man (meaning the Prophet, peace be on him) has asked us for *ṣadaqah* (charitable tax) and we cannot even find food to eat. He is oppressing us with his laws and prohibitions and I thought I could come to you to ask for a loan."

"By God, I am much more dissatisfied with him," confessed Ka'b.

"We have followed him but we do not want to leave him until we see how this whole business will end. We would like you to lend us a *wasaq* or two of gold," continued Muḥammad ibn Maslamah.

"Isn't it about time that you realize what falsehood you are tolerating from him?" asked Ka'b as he promised to give them the loan. "However," he said, "you must provide

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"Isn't it about time that you realize what falsehood you are tolerating from him?" asked Ka'b as he promised to give them the loan. "However," he said, "you must provide

security (for the loan)."

"What security do you want?" they asked.

"Give me your wives as security," he suggested.

"How can we give you our wives as security," they protested, "when you are the most handsome of Arabs?"

"Then give me your children as security," Ka'b suggested.

"How can we give you our children as security when any one of them would thereafter be ridiculed by being called a hostage for one or two *wasafs* of gold. This would be a disgrace to us. But we could give you our (means of) protection (meaning weapons) since you know that we need them."

Ka'b agreed to this suggestion which they had made to disabuse his mind of any notion that they had come armed. They promised to come back to him again to bring the weapons.

Meanwhile, Abū Nā'ilah also came up to Ka'b and said:

"Woe to you, Ibn al-Ashraf. I have come to you intending to mention something to you and you do not encourage me."

Ka'b asked him to go on and Abū Nā'ilah said:

"The coming of this man to us has been a source of affliction to our Arab customs. With one stroke he has severed our ways and left families hungry and in difficulties. We and our families are struggling."

Ka'b replied:

"I, Ibn al-Ashraf, by God, I had told you, son of Salamah, that the matter would end up as I predicted."

Abū Nā'ilah replied:

"I wish you could sell us some food and we would

give you whatever form of security and trust required. Be good to us. I have friends who share my views on this and I want to bring them to you so that you could sell them some food and deal well towards them. We will come to you and pledge our shields and weapons to you as security."

"There is loyalty and good faith in weapons," agreed Ka'b.

With this they left promising to return and bring the required security for the loan. They went back to the Prophet and reported to him what had happened. That night, Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, Abū Nā'ilah, 'Abbād ibn Bishr, al-Ḥārith ibn Aws and one other all set off for Ka'b's house. The Prophet went with them for a short distance and parted with the words:

"Go forth in the name of God." And he prayed: "O Lord, help them." The Prophet returned home. It was a moonlit night in the month of Rabī' al-Awwal in the third year of the hijrah.

Muḥammad ibn Maslamah and the four with him reached Ka'b's house. They called out to him. As he got out of bed, his wife held him and warned:

"You are a man at war. People at war do not go down at such an hour."

"It is only my nephew Muḥammad ibn Maslamah and my foster brother, Abū Nā'ilah..."

Ka'b came down with his sword drawn. He was heavily scented with the perfume of musk.

"I have not smelt such a pleasant scent as today," greeted Muḥammad ibn Maslamah. "Let me smell your head." Ka'b agreed and as Muḥammad bent over, he grasped Ka'b's head firmly and called on the others to

strike down the enemy of God.

(Details of this incident vary somewhat. Some reports state that it was Abū Nā'ilah who gave the command to strike down Ka'b and this was done after Ka'b had emerged from his house and walked with them for some time.)

The elimination of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf struck terror into the hearts of those, and there were many of them in Madinah, who plotted and intrigued against the Prophet. Such open hostility as Ka'b's diminished for a time but certainly did not cease.

At the beginning of the fourth year of the hijrah, the Prophet went to the Jewish tribe of Banū an-Naḍir on the outskirts of Madinah to seek their help on a certain matter. While among them, he found out that they were planning to kill him then and there. He had to take decisive action. The Banū an-Naḍir had gone too far. Straight away, the Prophet went back to the centre of the city. He summoned Muḥammad ibn Maslamah and sent him to inform the Banū an-Naḍir that they had to leave Madinah within ten days because of their treacherous behaviour and that any one of them seen after that in the city would forfeit his life.

One can just imagine Muḥammad ibn Maslamah addressing the Banū an-Naḍir. His towering stature and his loud and clear voice combined to let the Banū an-Naḍir know that the Prophet meant every word he said and that they had to stand the consequences of their treacherous acts. The fact that the Prophet chose Muḥammad ibn Maslamah for the task is a tribute to his loyalty, courage and firmness.

Further details of the expulsion of the Banū an-Naḍir

from Madinah do not concern us here: their plan to resist the Prophet with outside help; the Prophet's siege of their district and their eventual surrender and evacuation mainly to Khaybar in the north. Two of the Banū an-Naḍir though became Muslims - Yamīn ibn 'Umayr and Abū Sa'd ibn Wahb. All this happened exactly one year after the elimination of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf.

Both during the time of the Prophet and after, Muḥammad ibn Maslamah was known for carrying out any assignment he accepted exactly as he was ordered, neither doing more nor less than he was asked to do. It was these qualities which made 'Umar choose him as one of his ministers and as a trusted friend and guide.

When 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ requested reinforcements during his expedition to Egypt, 'Umar sent him four detachments of one thousand men each. Leading these detachments were Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, az-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām, 'Ubādah ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit and al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad. To 'Amr, 'Umar sent a message saying, "Let me remind you that I am sending Muḥammad ibn Maslamah to you to help you distribute your wealth. Accommodate him and forgive any harshness of his towards you."

Ibn Maslamah went to 'Amr in Fuṣṭāṭ (near present-day Cairo). He sat at his table but did not touch the food. 'Amr asked him:

"Did 'Umar prevent you from tasting my food?"

"No," replied ibn Maslamah, "he did not prevent me from having your food but neither did he command me to eat of it." He then placed a flat loaf of bread on the table and ate it with salt. 'Amr became upset and said:

"May God bring to an end the time in which we work

for 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb! I have witnessed a time when al-Khaṭṭāb and his son 'Umar were wandering around wearing clothes which could not even cover them properly while al-'Āṣ ibn Wā'il ('Amr's father) sported brocade lined with gold."

"As for your father and the father of 'Umar, they are in hell," retorted Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, because they did not accept Islam. "As for you, if 'Umar did not give you an appointment, you would have been pleased with what you got from their udders," continued Ibn Maslamah obviously disabusing 'Amr's mind of any ideas he might have of appearing superior because he was the governor of Egypt.

"Assemblies must be conducted as a form of trust," said 'Amr in an attempt to diffuse the situation and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah replied:

"Oh yes, so long as 'Umar is alive." He wanted to impress upon people the justice of 'Umar and the egalitarian teachings of Islam. Muḥammad ibn Maslamah was a veritable scourge against all arrogant and haughty behaviour.

On another occasion and at another end of the Muslim state under his caliphate, 'Umar heard that the famous Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ was building a palace at Kūfah. 'Umar sent Muḥammad ibn Maslamah to deal with the situation. On reaching Kufa, Muḥammad promptly burnt the palace down. One does not know whether people were more surprised by the instructions of 'Umar or by the humiliation of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, the famed fighter, conqueror at Qādisīyah, and the one praised by the Prophet himself for his sacrifices at Uḥud.

Sa'd did not say a word. This was all part of the great

process of self-criticism and rectification which helped to make Islam spread and establish it on foundations of justice and piety.

Muḥammad ibn Maslamah served 'Umar's successor, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, faithfully. When, however, the latter was killed and civil war broke out among the Muslims, Muḥammad ibn Maslamah did not participate. The sword which he always used and which was given to him by the Prophet himself he deliberately broke. During the time of the Prophet, he was known as the "Knight of the Prophet". By refusing to use the sword against Muslims he preserved this reputation undiminished.

Subsequently, he made a sword from wood and fashioned it well. He placed it in a scabbard and hung it inside his house. When he was asked about it he said:

"I simply hang it there to scare people."

Muḥammad ibn Maslamah died in Madīnah in the month of Ṣafar in the year 46 AH. He was seventy-seven years old.



23

Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd

Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd was from Najd in the northern highlands of Arabia. He belonged to the powerful Ghatafān tribe. As a young man, he was clever and alert. He was full of enterprise and travelled widely. He was resourceful, ever ready to take up a challenge and not prepared to allow any problem to get the better of him.

This son of the desert was endowed with extraordinary presence of mind and unusual subtlety. He was however someone who liked to enjoy himself and gave himself over to the pursuit of youthful passions. He loved music and took delight in the company of songstresses. Often when he felt the urge to listen to the strings of a musical instrument or to enjoy the company of a singer, he would leave the hearths of his people in the Najd and make his way to Yathrib and in particular to the Jewish community which was widely known for its song and music.

While in Yathrib, Nu'aym was known to spend generously and he in turn would be lavishly entertained. In this way Nu'aym came to develop strong links among the Jews of the city and in particular with the Banū Qurayzah.

At the time when God favoured mankind by sending

His Prophet with the religion of guidance and truth and the valleys of Makkah glowed with the light of Islam, Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd was still given over to the pursuit of sensual satisfaction. He stayed firmly opposed to the religion partly out of fear that he would be obliged to change and give up his pursuit of pleasure. And it was not long before he found himself being drawn into joining the fierce opposition to Islam and waging war against the Prophet and his companions.

The moment of truth for Nu'aym came during the great siege of Madīnah which took place in the fifth year of the Prophet's stay in the city. We need to go back a little to pick up the threads of the story.

Two years before the siege, the Prophet was compelled to banish a group of Jews belonging to the tribe of Banū an-Naḍir from Madīnah because of their collaboration with the Quraysh enemy. The Banū an-Naḍir migrated to the north and settled in Khaybar and other oases along the trade route to Syria. They at once began to incite the tribes both near and far against the Muslims. Caravans going to Madīnah were harassed partly to put economic pressure on the city.

But this was not enough. Leaders of the Banū an-Naḍir got together and decided to form a mighty alliance or confederacy of as many tribes as possible to wage war on the Prophet, and to put an end once and for all to his mission. The Naḍirites went to the Quraysh in Makkah and urged them to continue the fight against the Muslims. They made a pact with the Quraysh to attack Madīnah at a specified time.

After Makkah, the Naḍirite leaders set out northwards on a journey of some one thousand kilometres to meet

the Ghatafān. They promised the Ghatafān the entire annual date harvest of Khaybar for waging war against Islam and its Prophet. They informed the Ghatafān of the pact they had concluded with the Quraysh and persuaded them to make a similar agreement.

Other tribes were also persuaded to join the mighty alliance. From the north came the Banū Asad and the Fazar.

From the south the Aḥābīsh, allies of the Quraysh, the Banū Sulaym and others.

At the appointed time, the Quraysh set out from Makkah in large numbers on cavalry and on foot under the leadership of Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb. The Ghatafān too set out from Najd in large numbers under the leadership of 'Uyaynah ibn Ḥiṣn. In the vanguard of the Ghatafān army was Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd.

News of the impending attack on Madīnah reached the Prophet while he was half-way on a long expedition to Dumāt al-Jandal on the Syrian border some fifteen days journey from Madīnah. The tribe at Dumāt al-Jandal was molesting caravans bound for Madīnah and their action was probably prompted by the Banū an-Naḍīr to entice the Prophet away from Madīnah. With the Prophet away, they reasoned, it would be easier for the combined tribal forces from the north and the south to attack Madīnah and deal a mortal blow to the Muslim community with the help of disaffected persons from within the city itself.

The Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, hurried back to Madīnah and conferred with the Muslims. The forces of the Aḥzāb or the confederate enemy tribes amounted to over ten thousand men while the Muslims fighting were just three thousand men. It was unanimously

decided to defend the city from within and to prepare for a siege rather than fight in the open.

The Muslims were in dire straits.

"When they came upon you from above and from below you, and when eyes grew wild and hearts reached to the throats, and you were imagining vain thoughts concerning God - then were the believers sorely tried and shaken with a mighty shock." (*The Qur'ān*, Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33: 10).

To protect the city, the Muslims decided to dig a trench or *khandaq*. It is said that the trench was about three and a half miles long and some ten yards wide and five yards deep. The three thousand Muslims were divided into groups of ten and each group was given a fixed number of cubits to dig. The digging of the trench took one week to complete.

The trench was just completed when the mighty enemy forces from the north and the south converged on Madīnah. While they were within a short distance from the city the Naḍirite conspirators approached their fellow Jews of the Banū Qurayzah who lived in Madīnah and tried to persuade them to join the war against the Prophet by helping the two armies approaching from Makkah and the north. The response of the Qurayzah Jews to the Naḍirite leaders was:

"You have indeed called us to participate in something which we like and desire to have accomplished. But you know there is a treaty between us and Muḥammad binding us to keep the peace with him so long as we live secure and content in Madīnah. You do realize that our pact with him is still valid. We are afraid that if Muḥammad is victorious in this war he would then punish us severely

and that he would expel us from Madinah as a result of our treachery towards him."

The Naḍirite leaders however continued to pressurize the Banū Qurayzah to renege on their treaty. Treachery to Muḥammad, they affirmed, was a good and necessary act. They assured the Banū Qurayzah that there was no doubt this time that the Muslims would be completely routed and Muḥammad would be finished once and for all.

The approach of the two mighty armies strengthened the resolve of the Banū Qurayzah to disavow their treaty with Muḥammad. They tore up the pact and declared their support for the confederates. The news fell on the Muslims ears with the force of a thunderbolt.

The confederate armies were now pressing against Madinah. They effectively cut off the city and prevented food and provisions and any form of outside help or reinforcement from reaching the inhabitants of the city. After the terrible exhaustions of the past months the Prophet now felt as if they had fallen between the jaws of the enemy. The Quraysh and the Ghatafān were besieging the city from without. The Banū Qurayzah were laying in wait behind the Muslims, ready to pounce from within the city. Added to this, the hypocrites of Madinah, those who had openly professed Islam but remained secretly opposed to the Prophet and his mission, began to come out openly and cast doubt and ridicule on the Prophet.

"Muḥammad promised us," they said, "that we would gain possession of the treasures of Persia and Byzantium and here we are today with not a single one of us being able to guarantee that he could go to the toilet safely to relieve himself!"

Thereafter, group after group of the inhabitants of Madinah began to disassociate themselves from the Prophet expressing fear for their women and children and for their homes should the Banū Qurayzah attack once the fighting began.

The enemy forces though vastly superior in numbers were, however, confounded by the enormous trench. They had never seen or heard of such a military stratagem among the Arabs. Nonetheless they tightened their siege of the city. At the same time they attempted to breach the trench at some narrow points but were repulsed by the vigilant Muslims. So hard-pressed were the Muslims that the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions once did not even have time for Ṣalāt and the Zuh̄r, 'Aṣr, Maghrib and 'Ishā prayers had to be performed during the night.

As the siege wore on and the situation became more critical for the Muslims, Muḥammad turned fervently to his Lord for succour and support.

"O God," he prayed, "I beseech you to grant Your promise of victory. O God I beseech You to grant your promise of victory."

On that night, as the Prophet prayed, Nu'aym lay tossing in his bivouac. He could not sleep. He kept gazing at the stars in the vast firmament above. He thought hard and long and suddenly he found himself exclaiming and asking:

"Woe to you, Nu'aym! What is it really that has brought you from those far off places in Najd to fight this man and those with him? Certainly you are not fighting him for the triumph of right or for the protection of some honour violated. Really you have only come here to fight for some unknown reason. Is it reasonable that someone

with a mind such as yours should fight and kill or be killed for no cause whatsoever? Woe to you, Nu'aym. What is it that has caused you to draw your sword against this righteous man who exhorts his followers to justice, good deeds and helping relatives? And what is it that has driven you to sink your spear into the bodies of his followers who follow the message of guidance and truth that he brought?"

Nu'aym thus struggled with his conscience and debated with himself. Then he came to a decision. Suddenly he stood upright, determined. The doubts were gone. Under the cover of darkness, he slipped away from the camp of his tribe and made his way to the Prophet of God, peace and blessings of Allāh be on him.

When the Prophet beheld him, standing erect in his presence, he exclaimed, "Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd?"

"Yes, O Messenger of God," declared Nu'aym.

"What has brought you here at this hour?"

"I came", said Nu'aym, "to declare that there is no god but Allāh and that you are the Servant of God and His Messenger and that the message you have brought is true."

He went on: "I have declared my submission to God, O Messenger of God, but my people do not know of my submission. Command me therefore to do whatever you desire."

"You are only one person among us," observed the Prophet. "So go to your people and act as if you have nothing to do with us for indeed war is treachery."

"Yes, O Messenger of God," replied Nu'aym. And if God wills, you shall witness what pleases you."

Without losing any time, Nu'aym went to the Banū Qurayzah. He was, as was mentioned earlier, a close friend

of the tribe.

"O Banū Qurayzah," he said. "You have known my love for you and my sincerity in advising you."

"Yes," they agreed, "but what are you suspicious of so far as we are concerned?"

Nu'aym continued:

"The Quraysh and the Ghatafān have their own interests in this war which are different from your interests."

"How so?" they queried.

"This is your city," Nu'aym asserted. "You have your wealth, your children and your womenfolk here and it is not in your power to flee and take refuge in another city. On the other hand, the Quraysh and the Ghatafān have their land, their wealth, their children and their womenfolk away from this city. They came to fight Muḥammad. They urged you to break the treaty you had with him and to help them against him. So you responded positively to them. If they were to be victorious in their encounter with him, they would reap the booty. But if they fail to subdue him, they would return to their land safe and sound and they would leave you to him and he would be in a position to exact the most bitter revenge on you. You know very well that you would have no power to confront him."

"You are right," they said. "But what suggestion do you have?"

"My opinion," Nu'aym suggested, "is that you should not join forces with them until you take a group of their prominent men as hostages. In that way you could carry on the fight against Muḥammad either till victory or till the last of your men or theirs perish. (They would not be able to leave you in the lurch)."

"You have advised well," they responded and agreed to take up his suggestion.

Nu'aym then left and went to Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, the Quraysh leader and spoke to him and other Quraysh leaders.

"O Quraysh," said Nu'aym, "You know my affection for you and my enmity towards Muḥammad. I have heard some news and I thought it my duty to disclose it to you but you should keep it confidential and do not attribute it to me..."

"You must inform us of this matter," insisted the Quraysh.

Nu'aym continued: "The Banū Qurayzah now regret that they have agreed to participate in the hostilities against Muḥammad. They fear that you would turn back and abandon them to him. So they have sent a message to Muḥammad saying: 'We are sorry for what we have done and we are determined to return to the treaty and a state of peace with you. Would it please you then if we take several Quraysh and Ghatafān nobles and surrender them to you? We will then join you in fighting them - the Quraysh and the Ghatafān - until you finish them off.' The Prophet has sent back a reply to them saying he agrees. If therefore the Jews send a delegation to you demanding hostages from among your men do not hand over a single person to them. And do not mention a word of what I said to you."

"What a good ally you are. May you be rewarded well," said Abū Sufyān gratefully.

Nu'aym then went to his own people the Ghatafān, and spoke to them in a similar vein. He gave them the same warning against expected treachery from the Banū

Qurayzah.

Abū Sufyān wanted to test the Banū Qurayzah so he sent his son to them.

"My father sends greetings of peace to you," began Abū Sufyān's son. "He says that our siege of Muḥammad and his companions has been a protracted affair and we have become weary... We are now determined to fight Muḥammad and finish him off. My father has sent me to you to ask you to join battle with Muḥammad tomorrow."

"But tomorrow is Saturday," said the Jews of Banū Qurayzah, "and we do not work at all on Saturdays. Moreover, we would not fight with you until you hand over to us seventy of your nobles and nobles from the Ghatafān as hostages. We fear that if the fighting becomes too intense for you, you would hasten back home and leave us alone to Muḥammad. You know that we have no power to resist him..."

When Abū Sufyān's son returned to his people and told them what he had heard from the Banū Qurayzah, they shouted in unison:

"Damned be the sons of monkeys and swine! By God, if they were to demand from us a single sheep as a hostage, we would not give them."

And so it was that Nu'aym was successful in causing disharmony among the confederates and splitting their ranks.

While the mighty alliance was in this state of disarray, God sent down on the Quraysh and their allies a fierce and bitterly cold wind which swept their tents and their equipment away, extinguished their fires, buffeted their faces and cast sand in their eyes. In this terrible state of confusion the allies fled under cover of darkness.

That very night the Prophet had sent one of his companions, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, to get information on the enemy's morale and intentions. He brought back the news that on the advice and initiative of Abū Sufyān, the enemy had turned on their heels and fled. The news quickly spread through the Muslims ranks and they shouted in joy and relief:

*Lā ilāha illa Allāhu waḥdah
Ṣadaqa wa'dah
Wa naṣara 'abdah
Wa a'azza jundah
Wa hazama-l aḥzāba waḥdah.*

There is no god but Allāh alone
To His promise He has been true
His servant He has helped
His forces He has strengthened
And Alone the confederates He has destroyed.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, praised and gave thanks to his Lord for His deliverance from the threat posed by the mighty alliance. Nu'aym, as a result of his subtle but major role in the blasting of the alliance, gained the confidence of the Prophet who entrusted him thereafter with many a difficult task. He became the standard-bearer of the Prophet on several occasions.

Three years after the Battle of the Trench, on the day the Muslims marched victoriously into Makkah, Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb stood surveying the Muslim armies. He beheld a man carrying the Ghatafān flag and asked:

"Who is this?"

"Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd," came the reply.

"He did a terrible thing to us at al-Khandaq," Abū Sufyān confessed. "By God, he was certainly one of the fiercest enemies of Muḥammad and here he is now carrying his people's flag in the ranks of Muḥammad and coming to wage war on us under his leadership."

Through the grace of God and the magnanimity of the noble Prophet, Abū Sufyān himself was soon to join the same ranks.

**‘Abbād ibn Bishr**

It was the fourth year after the Hijrah. The city of the Prophet was still under threat from within and without. From within, the influential Jewish tribe, the Banū an-Naḍir, broke their agreement with the Prophet and made plans to kill him. For this, they were banished from the city. This was in the month of Ṣafar.

Two months of uneasy quiet passed. Then the Prophet received news that tribes from distant Najd were planning an attack. To pre-empt them, the Prophet gathered a force of over four hundred men, and leaving one of his companions, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, in charge of the city, set out eastwards. Among this force was the young Madīnan, ‘Abbād ibn Bishr.

Arriving at Najd, the Prophet found the habitations of the hostile tribes strangely deserted of men. Only women were about. The men had taken to the hills. Some of them regrouped and prepared to fight. The time of Ṣalāt al-‘Aṣr (the afternoon prayer) came. The Prophet feared that the hostile tribesmen would attack them during prayer. He arranged the Muslims in ranks and divided them into two groups and performed the prayer as the Ṣalāt al-Khawf (the Prayer of Fear). With one group he performed

one rak‘ah while the other group stood on guard. For the second rak‘ah the groups changed places. Each group completed its prayer with one rak‘ah after the Prophet had finished.

On beholding the disciplined ranks of the Muslims the hostile tribesmen became uneasy and afraid. The Prophet had made his presence felt and something of his mission was now known at first hand in the central highlands of Arabia whence he departed peacefully.

On the way back, the Prophet pitched camp in a valley for a night. As soon as the Muslims had settled their camel mounts, the Prophet, peace be on him, asked:

“Who will be our guard tonight?”

“We, O Messenger of God,” said ‘Abbād ibn Bishr and ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir both of whom had been paired off as ‘brothers’ by the Prophet when he arrived in Madīnah after the Hijrah.

‘Abbād and ‘Ammār left for the mouth of the valley to take up duty. ‘Abbād saw that his “brother” was tired and asked him:

“What part of the night do you wish to sleep, the first or the second?”

“I shall sleep during the first part,” said ‘Ammār who was soon fast asleep quite close to ‘Abbād.

The night was clear, calm and peaceful. The stars, the trees, and the rocks all appeared to celebrate in silence the praises of their Lord. ‘Abbād felt serene. There was no movement, no threatening sign. Why not spend the time in *‘ibādah* (worship) and reciting the Qur’ān? How delightful it would be to combine the performance of Ṣalāt with the measured recitation of the Qur’ān which he so much enjoyed.

In fact 'Abbād was enthralled by the Qur'ān from the moment he had first heard it being recited by the mellow and beautiful voice of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr. That was before the Hijrah when 'Abbād was just about fifteen years old. The Qur'ān had found a special place in his heart and day and night thereafter he would be heard repeating the glorious words of God so much so that he became known among the Prophet's companions as the "friend of the Qur'ān".

Late at night, the Prophet once stood up to perform the Tahajjud Prayer in 'Ā'ishah's house which adjoined the masjid. He heard a voice reciting the Qur'ān, pure and sweet and as fresh as when the angel Jibrīl revealed the words to him. He asked:

"'Ā'ishah, is that the voice of 'Abbād ibn Bishr?"

"Yes, O Messenger of God," replied 'Ā'ishah.

"O Lord, forgive him," prayed the Prophet out of love for him.

And so in the stillness of the night, at the mouth of the valley in Najd, 'Abbād stood up and faced the Qiblah. Raising his hand in surrender to God, he entered into the state of Prayer. Finishing the compulsory opening chapter of the Qur'ān, he began reciting Sūrah al-Kahf in his sweet, captivating voice. Sūrah al-Kahf is a long sūrah of one hundred and ten verses which deals in part with the virtues of faith, truth and patience and with the relativity of time.

While he was thus absorbed in reciting and reflecting upon the Divine words, eternal words of illumination and wisdom, a stranger stalked the outskirts of the valley in search of Muḥammad and his followers. He was one of those who had planned to attack the Prophet but who had

fled into the mountains on the approach of the Muslims. His wife whom he had left in the village had been taken as a hostage by one of the Muslims. When he eventually found that his wife was gone, he swore by al-Lāt and al-'Uzza that he would pursue Muḥammad and his companions and that he would not return unless he had drawn blood.

From a distance, the man saw the figure of 'Abbād silhouetted at the mouth of the valley and he knew that the Prophet and his followers must be inside the valley. Silently he drew his bow and let fly an arrow. Unerringly it embedded itself in 'Abbād's flesh.

Calmly, 'Abbād pulled out the arrow from his body and went on with his recitation, still absorbed in his Ṣalāt. The attacker shot a second and a third arrow both of which also found their mark. 'Abbād pulled out one and then the other. He finished his recitation, made *rukū'* and then *sujūd*. Weak and in pain, he stretched out his right hand while still in prostration and shook his sleeping companion. 'Ammār awoke. Silently, 'Abbād continued the Ṣalāt to its end and then said:

"Get up and stand guard in my place. I have been wounded."

'Ammār jumped up and began to yell. Seeing them both the attacker fled into the darkness. 'Ammār turned to 'Abbād as he lay on the ground, blood flowing from his wounds.

"*Yā Subḥānallāh* (Glory be to God)! Why didn't you wake me when you were hit by the first arrow?"

"I was in the midst of reciting verses of the Qur'ān which filled my soul with awe and I did not want to cut short the recitation. The Prophet had commanded me to

commit this sūrah to memory. Death would have been dearer to me than that the recitation of this sūrah should be interrupted."

'Abbād's devotion to the Qur'ān was a sign of his intense devotion to and love for God, His Prophet and His religion. The qualities he was known for were his constant immersion in *'ibādah*, his heroic courage and his generosity in the path of God. At times of sacrifice and death, he would always be in the front line. When it was time for receiving his share of rewards, he would only be found after much effort and difficulty. He was always trustworthy in his dealings with the wealth of Muslims. All this was recognized by 'Ā'ishah, the wife of the Prophet, who once said:

"There are three persons among the Anṣār whom no one could excel in virtue: Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, Usayd ibn Hudayr and 'Abbād ibn Bishr."

'Abbād died the death of a *shahīd* (martyr) at the Battle of Yamāmah. Just before the battle he had a strong presentiment of death and martyrdom. He noticed that there was a lack of mutual confidence among the Muhājirīn and Anṣār. He was grieved and upset. He realized that there would be no success for the Muslims in these terrible battles unless the Muhājirīn and Anṣār were grouped in separate regiments so that it could be clearly seen who really bore their responsibility and who were truly steadfast in combat.

At the break of day when the battle commenced, 'Abbād ibn Bishr stood on a mound and shouted:

"O Anṣār, distinguish yourselves among men. Destroy your scabbards. And do not forsake Islam."

'Abbād harangued the Anṣār until about four hundred

men gathered around him at the head of whom were Thābit ibn Qays, al-Barā'a ibn Mālīk and Abū Dujānah, the keeper of the Prophet's sword. With this force, 'Abbād unleashed an offensive into the enemy's ranks which blunted their thrust and drove them back to the "garden of death".

At the walls of this garden, 'Abbād ibn Bishr fell. So numerous were his wounds, he was hardly recognizable. He had lived, fought and died as an unswerving believer.



25

Habīb ibn Zayd

He grew up in a home filled with the fragrance of *īmān*, and in a family where everyone was imbued with the spirit of sacrifice. Ḥabīb's father, Zayd ibn 'Āsim, was one of the first persons in Yathrib to accept Islam and his mother, the celebrated Nuṣaybah bint Ka'b known as Umm 'Ammārah, was the first woman to bear arms in defence of Islam and in support of the blessed Prophet.

Ḥabīb, still at a tender age, was privileged to go with his mother, father, maternal aunt and brother to Makkah with the pioneering group of seventy-five who pledged fealty to the Prophet at 'Aqabah and played a decisive role in shaping the early history of Islam.

At 'Aqabah, in the darkness of the night, the young Ḥabīb stretched out his small hand and pledged loyalty to the Prophet. From that day, the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, became dearer to Ḥabīb than his own mother or father and Islam became more important to him than any care for his personal safety.

Ḥabīb did not participate in the Battle of Badr because he was too young. Neither did he have the opportunity to take part in the Battle of Uḥud because he was still considered too young to bear arms. Thereafter, however,

he took part in all the engagements which the Prophet fought and in all he distinguished himself by his bravery and willingness to sacrifice. Although each of these battles had its own importance and was demanding in its own way, they served to prepare Ḥabīb for what was to prove the most terrible encounter of his life, the violence of which is profoundly soul-shaking.

Let us follow this awesome story from the beginning.

By the ninth year after the Hijrah, Islam had spread widely and had become the dominant force in the Arabian peninsula. Delegations of tribes from all over the land converged on Makkah to meet the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, and announce before him their acceptance of Islam.

Among these delegations was one from the highlands of Najd, from the Banū Ḥanīfah. At the outskirts of Madinah, the members of the delegation tethered their mounts and appointed Musaylamah ibn Ḥabīb as their spokesman and representative. Musaylamah went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and announced his people's acceptance of Islam. The Prophet welcomed them and treated them most generously. Each, including Musaylamah, was presented with a gift.

On his return to Najd the ambitious and self-seeking Musaylamah recanted and gave up his allegiance to the Prophet. He stood among the people and proclaimed that a prophet had been sent by God to the Banū Ḥanīfah just as God had sent Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh to the Quraysh.

For various reasons and under a variety of pressures, the Banū Ḥanīfah began to rally around him. Most followed him out of tribal loyalty or '*aṣabīyah*. Indeed one member of the tribe declared:

"I testify that Muḥammad is indeed truthful and that Musaylamah is indeed an imposter. But the imposter of Rabi'āh (the tribal confederation to which the Banū Ḥanīfah belonged) is dearer to me than the genuine and truthful person from Muḍar (the tribal confederation to which the Quraysh belonged)."

Before long, the number of Musaylamah's followers increased and he felt powerful, powerful enough to write the following letter to the Prophet, peace be upon him:

"From Musaylamah, the messenger of God to Muḥammad, the messenger of God.

Peace be on you.

I am prepared to share this mission with you. I shall have (control over) half the land and you shall have the other half. But the Quraysh are an aggressive people."

Musaylamah despatched two of his men with the letter to the Prophet. When the letter was read to the Prophet, he asked the two men:

"And what do you yourselves say about this matter?"

"We affirm what the letter says," they replied.

"By God," said the Prophet, "were it not for the fact that emissaries are not killed I would have smitten both your necks." He then wrote to Musaylamah:

"In the name of God, most Gracious, most Merciful.

From Muḥammad the Messenger of God, to Musaylamah the imposter.

Peace be upon whoever follows the guidance. God will bequeath the earth to whomsoever of His servants He wishes and the final triumph will be for those who are careful of their duty to God."

He sent the letter with the two men.

Musaylamah's evil and corrupting influence continued

to spread and the Prophet considered it necessary to send another letter to him inviting him to abandon his misguided ways. The Prophet chose Ḥabīb ibn Zayd to take this letter to Musaylamah. Ḥabīb was by this time in the prime of his youth and a firm believer in the truth of Islam with every fibre of his being.

Ḥabīb undertook his mission eagerly and proceeded as quickly as he could to the highlands of the Najd, the territory of the Banū Ḥanīfah. He presented the letter to Musaylamah.

Musaylamah was convulsed with bitter rage. His face was terrible to behold. He ordered Ḥabīb to be put in chains and to be brought back before him the following day.

On the following day, Musaylamah presided over his assembly. On his right and on his left were his senior advisers, there to further his evil cause. The common people were allowed to enter. He then ordered Ḥabīb, shackled in his chains, to be brought before him.

Ḥabīb stood in the midst of this crowded, hate-filled gathering. He remained upright, dignified and proud like a sturdy spear firmly implanted in the ground, unyielding.

Musaylamah turned to him and asked:

"Do you testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God?"

"Yes," Ḥabīb replied. "I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God."

Musaylamah was visibly angry.

"And do you testify that I am the Messenger of God?" He was almost insisting, rather than questioning.

"My ears have been blocked against hearing what you claim," replied Ḥabīb.

Musaylamah's face changed colour, his lips trembled in anger and he shouted to his executioner, "Cut off a piece of his body."

With sword in hand, the menacing executioner advanced towards Ḥabīb and severed one of his limbs.

Musaylamah then put the same question to him once more and Ḥabīb's answers were the same. He affirmed his belief in Muḥammad as the Messenger of God and at the expense of his own life he refused to acknowledge the messengership of any other. Musaylamah thereupon ordered his henchman to cut off another part of Ḥabīb's body. This fell to the ground beside the other severed limb. The people looked on in amazement at Ḥabīb's composure and steadfastness.

Faced with Musaylamah's persistent questioning and the terrible blows of his henchman, Ḥabīb kept on repeating:

"I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God."

Ḥabīb could not survive this torture and these inhuman atrocities much longer and he soon passed away. On his pure lips, as his life-blood ebbed away, was the name of the blessed Prophet to whom he had pledged loyalty on the night of 'Aqabah, the name of Muḥammad, the Messenger of God.

News of Ḥabīb's fate reached his mother and her reaction was simply to say:

"It was for such a situation that I prepared him... He pledged allegiance to the Prophet on the night of 'Aqabah as a small child and today as an adult he has given his life for the Prophet. If God were to allow me to get near to Musaylamah, I would certainly make his daughters smite their cheeks and lament over him."

The day that she wished for was not long in coming. After the death of the Prophet, peace be on him, Abū Bakr declared war on the imposter. With the Muslim army that went out to confront the forces of Musaylamah were Ḥabīb's mother, Nuṣaybah, and another of her courageous sons, 'Abdullāh ibn Zayd.

At the Battle of Yarnāmah which ensued, Nuṣaybah was seen cutting through the ranks of fighting men like a lioness and calling out:

"Where is the enemy of God? Show me the enemy of God!"

When she eventually reached Musaylamah, he had already perished. She looked at the body of the vain imposter and cruel tyrant and felt serene. A grave threat to the Muslims had been removed and the death of her beloved son, Ḥabīb, had been avenged.

At Ḥabīb's death, the noble Prophet had commended him and his entire family and had prayed:

"May God bless this household. May God have mercy on this household."



26

Rabī'ah ibn K'ab

Here is the story of Rabī'ah told in his own words:

"I was still quite young when the light of *īmān* shone through me and my heart was opened to the teachings of Islam. And when my eyes beheld the Messenger of God, for the first time, I loved him with a love that possessed my entire being. I loved him to the exclusion of everyone else.

One day I said to myself:

'Woe to you, Rabī'ah. Why don't you put yourself completely in the service of the Messenger of God, peace be on him? Go and suggest this to him. If he is pleased with you, you would find happiness in being near him. You will be successful through love for him and you will have the good fortune of obtaining the good in this world and the good in the next.'

This I did hoping that he would accept me in his service. He did not dash my hopes. He was pleased that I should be his servant. From that day, I lived in the shadow of the noble Prophet. I went with him wherever he went. I moved in his orbit whenever and wherever he turned. Whenever he cast a glance in my direction, I would leap to stand in his presence. Whenever he expressed a need, he would

find me hurrying to fulfil it.

I would serve him throughout the day. When the day was over and he had prayed *Ṣalāt al-'Ishā'* and retired to his home, I would think about leaving. But I would soon say to myself:

'Where would you go, Rabī'ah? Perhaps you may be required to do something for the Prophet during the night.'

So I would remain seated at his door and would not leave the threshold of his house.

The Prophet would spend part of his night engaged in *Ṣalāt*. I would hear him reciting the opening chapter of the *Qur'ān* and he would continue reciting sometimes for a third or a half of the night. I would become tired and leave or my eyes would get the better of me and I would fall asleep.

It was the habit of the Prophet, peace be on him, that if someone did him a good turn, he loved to repay that person with something more excellent. He wanted to do something for me too in return for my service to him. So one day he came up to me and said:

'O Rabī'ah ibn Ka'b.'

'*Labbayk yā rasūlullāh wa sa'dayk* - At your command, O Messenger of God and at your pleasure,' I responded.

'Ask of me anything and I will give it to you.'

I thought a little and then said: 'Give me some time, O Messenger of God, to think about what I should ask of you. Then I will let you know.'

He agreed.

At that time, I was a young man and poor. I had neither family, nor wealth, nor place of abode. I used to shelter in the *Ṣuffah* of the mosque with other poor Muslims like

myself. People used to call us the "guests of Islam". Whenever any Muslim brought something in charity to the Prophet, he would send it all to us. And if someone gave him a gift he would take some of it and leave the rest for us.

So, it occurred to me to ask the Prophet for some worldly good that would save me from poverty and make me like others who had wealth, wife and children. Soon, however, I said:

'May you perish Rabī'ah! The world is temporary and will pass away. You have your share of sustenance in it which God has guaranteed and which must come to you. The Prophet, peace be on him, has a place with his Lord and no request would be refused him. Request him therefore, to ask Allāh to grant you something of the bounty of the hereafter.'

I felt pleased and satisfied with this thought. I went to the Prophet and he asked:

'What do you say, O Rabī'ah?'

'O Messenger of God,' I said, 'I ask you to beseech God most High on my behalf to make me your companion in Paradise.'

'Who has advised you thus?' asked the Prophet.

'No one, by God,' I said, 'no one has advised me. But when you told me 'Ask of me anything and I will give to you,' I thought of asking you for something of the goodness of this world. But before long, I was guided to choose what is permanent and lasting against what is temporary and perishable. And so I have asked you to beseech God on my behalf that I may be your companion in Paradise.'

The Prophet remained silent for a long while and then

asked:

'Any other request besides that, Rabī'ah?'

'No, O Messenger of God, Nothing can match what I have asked you.'

'Then, in that case, assist me for your sake by performing much prostration to God.'

So I began to exert myself in worship in order to attain the good fortune of being with the Prophet in Paradise just as I had the good fortune of being in his service and being his companion in this world.

Not long afterwards, the Prophet called me and asked:

'Don't you want to get married, Rabī'ah?'

'I do not want anything to distract me from your service,' I replied. 'Moreover, I don't have anything to give as *mahr* (dowry) to a wife nor any place where I can accommodate a wife.'

The Prophet remained silent. When he saw me again he asked:

'Don't you want to get married, Rabī'ah?'

I gave him the same reply as before. Left to myself again, I regretted what I had said and chided myself: 'Woe to you, Rabī'ah. By God, the Prophet knows better than you what is good for you in this world and the next and he also knows better than you what you possess. By God, if the Prophet, peace be on him, should ask me again to marry, I would reply positively.'

Before long, the Prophet asked me again:

'Don't you want to get married Rabī'ah?'

'Oh yes, Messenger of God,' I replied, 'but who will marry me when I am in the state you know.'

'Go to the family of so-and-so and say to them: the Prophet has instructed you to give your daughter in

marriage to me.'

Timidly, I went to the family and said: 'The Messenger of God, peace be on him, has sent me to you to ask you to give your daughter in marriage to me.'

'Our daughter?' they asked, incredulously at first.

'Yes,' I replied.

'Welcome to the Messenger of God, and welcome to his messenger. By God, the messenger of God's Messenger shall only return with his mission fulfilled.' So they made a marriage contract between me and her.

I went back to the Prophet and reported:

'O Messenger of Allāh. I have come from the best of homes. They believed me, they welcomed me, and they made a marriage contract between me and their daughter. But from where do I get the *mahr* for her?'

The Prophet then sent for Buraydah ibn al-Huṣayb, one of the leading persons in my tribe, the Banū Aslam, and said to him: 'O Buraydah, collect a *nuwat*'s weight in gold for Rabī'ah.'

This they did and the Prophet said to me: 'Take this to them and say, this is the *ṣadāq* of your daughter.'

I did so and they accepted it. They were pleased and said, 'This is much and good.'

I went back to the Prophet and told him: 'I have never yet seen a people more generous than they. They were pleased with what I gave them in spite of its being little... Where can I get something for the *walimah* (marriage feast), O Prophet of God?'

The Prophet said to Buraydah, 'Collect the price of a ram for Rabī'ah.'

They bought a big fat ram for me and then the Prophet told me:

'Go to 'Ā'ishah and tell her to give you whatever barley she has.'

'Ā'ishah gave me a bag with seven sās of barley and said: 'By God, we do not have any other food.'

I set off with the ram and the barley to my wife's family. They said:

'We will prepare the barley but get your friends to prepare the ram for you.'

We slaughtered, skinned and cooked the ram. So we had bread and meat for the *walimah*. I invited the Prophet and he accepted my invitation.

The Prophet then gave me a piece of land near Abū Bakr's. From then I became concerned with the *dunya*, with material things. I had a dispute with Abū Bakr over a palm tree.

'It is in my land,' I insisted.

'No, it is in my land,' Abū Bakr countered. We started to argue. Abū Bakr cursed me, but as soon as he had uttered the offending word, he felt sorry and said to me:

'Rabī'ah, say the same word to me so that it could be considered as *qiṣāṣ* - just retaliation.'

'No, by God, I shall not,' I said.

'In that case, replied Abū Bakr. 'I shall go the Messenger of God and complain to him about your refusal to retaliate against me measure for measure.'

He set off and I followed him. My tribe, the Banū Aslam, also set off behind me protesting indignantly:

'He's the one who cursed you first and then he goes off to the Prophet before you to complain about you!'

I turned to them and said:

'Woe to you! Do you know who this is? This is aṣ-Ṣiddīq... and he is the respected elder of the Muslims. Go

back before he turns around, sees you and thinks that you have come to help me against him. He would then be more incensed and go to the Prophet in anger. The Prophet would get angry on his account. Then God would be angry on their account and Rabī'ah would be finished.'

They turned back.

Abū Bakr went to the Prophet and related the incident as it had happened.

The Prophet raised his head and said to me:

'O Rabī'ah, what's wrong with you and aṣ-Ṣiddīq?'

'Messenger of God, he wanted me to say the same words to him as he had said to me and I did not.'

'Yes, don't say the same word to him as he had said to you. Instead say:

'May God forgive you Abū Bakr.'

With tears in his eyes, Abū Bakr went away while saying:

'May God reward you with goodness for my sake, O Rabī'ah ibn Ka'b.

'May God reward you with goodness for my sake, O Rabī'ah ibn Ka'b.'"



Abu-l 'Āṣ ibn ar-Rabī'ah

Abū-l 'Āṣ belonged to the 'Abd ash-Shams clan of the Quraysh. He was in the prime of his youth, handsome and very impressive looking. He was the epitome of Arab chivalry and was endowed with all the characteristics of pride, manliness and generosity. He took great pride in the traditions of his ancestors.

Abū-l 'Āṣ inherited the Quraysh love for trade. The Quraysh of course were known to be masters of the two annual trading expeditions, the winter expedition to the south, to Yemen, and the summer expedition to the north, to Syria. These two expeditions are mentioned in the Qur'ān in the chapter named after the Quraysh.

The caravans of Abū-l 'Āṣ always plied between Makkah and Syria. Each caravan was made up of two hundred men and a hundred camels. People would entrust their wealth and their goods to him to trade on their behalf because of his skill as a merchant, his honesty and his trustworthiness.

The maternal aunt of Abū-l 'Āṣ was Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, the wife of Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh. She treated him like a mother would her own son, with love and affection. Muḥammad too was extremely fond of him.

The years went by quickly in the household of Muḥammad and Khadijah. Zaynab, their eldest daughter, soon grew up and blossomed forth like a lovely flower. She was much sought after in marriage by the sons of respectable Makkan nobles. And why not? She was one of the most distinguished Makkan girls in lineage and social standing. She was blessed with the most honourable father and mother. And she had the finest morals and behaviour.

Which one of these scions of Makkan nobility would win her hand? Abū-l 'Āṣ ibn Rabi'ah was the one who did.

Abū-l 'Āṣ and Zaynab were only married a few years when the Divine light of Islam radiated over Makkah. Muḥammad, the father of Zaynab, was now the Prophet of God, sent to convey the religion of guidance and truth. He was commanded to convey the message of Islam first to his family and nearest relatives. The first women to believe in him and accept Islam were his wife Khadijah and his daughters Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthūm and Fāṭimah. Fāṭimah was very young at the time.

Zaynab's husband however did not like leaving the religion of his forefathers and he refused to adopt the religion which his wife now followed although he was completely devoted to her and loved her dearly with a pure and sincere love.

Before long, the confrontation between the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the Quraysh developed and grew bitter. The Quraysh felt that it was intolerable for their sons to remain married to Muḥammad's daughters. They also considered that it would be an embarrassing and difficult situation for Muḥammad if his daughters were to

be returned to his household. So they went to Abū-l 'Āṣ and said:

"Divorce your wife, Abū-l 'Āṣ, and send her back to her father's house. We shall then marry you to any of the most charming and noble women of the Quraysh you desire."

"No, by God," said Abū-l 'Āṣ firmly. "I shall not divorce my wife and I do not wish to have in her place any woman in all the world."

Muḥammad's other two daughters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthūm were divorced by their husbands and returned to his home. The Prophet in fact was delighted when they came back to him and he had hoped that Abū-l 'Āṣ would also return Zaynab to him except that at that time he had no power to compel him to do so. The law forbidding the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-believing man was not yet in force.

The Prophet, peace be on him, migrated to Madinah and his mission became stronger. The Quraysh felt even more threatened by him and went out to confront him at Badr. Abū-l 'Āṣ was compelled to go along with the Quraysh army. He did not really have any desire to fight the Muslims nor did he feel any inclination to join them. But his position among the Quraysh - one of honour and trust - impelled him to go along with their campaign against Muḥammad. The Battle of Badr ended in terrible defeat for the Quraysh and the forces of *shirk*. Some were killed, some were taken prisoner and some managed to escape. Among those, who were taken prisoner was Abū-l 'Āṣ, the husband of Zaynab.

The Prophet fixed amounts for the ransom of the prisoners of war varying from one thousand to four

thousand dirhams, according to the wealth and social standing of the prisoner. Quraysh messengers went to and fro between Makkah and Madinah bearing the ransom money to free their relatives held in Madinah. Zaynab sent her messenger to Madinah bearing the ransom demand to free her husband. The ransom amount included a necklace which her mother, Khadijah, had given to her before she died. When the Prophet saw the necklace, his face at once became covered with a veil of sadness and he felt a surge of tenderness for his daughter. He turned to his companions and said:

"Zaynab has sent this amount to ransom Abū-l 'Āṣ. If you see fit to set free her prisoner and return her possession to her, then do so."

"Yes," his companions agreed. "We shall do whatever we can to soothe your eyes and make you happy."

The Prophet set one condition on Abū-l 'Āṣ before he freed him, that he should send his daughter Zaynab to him without delay.

As soon as he reached Makkah, Abū-l 'Āṣ began making arrangements to carry out his promise. He ordered his wife to prepare herself for the journey and told her that her father's messengers were waiting for her just outside Makkah. He prepared provisions and a mount for her and instructed his brother, 'Amr ibn ar-Rabi'ah, to accompany her and hand her over personally to the Prophet's emissaries.

'Amr slung his bow over his shoulders, took up his quiver of arrows, placed Zaynab in her *hawdaj* and left Makkah with her in the broad light of day, in full view of the Quraysh.

The Quraysh were furious. They pursued Zaynab and

'Amr until they caught up with them. Zaynab was scared.

'Amr stood poised with his bow and arrow and shouted:

"By God, if any man comes near to her, I would plunge this arrow in his neck". 'Amr was known to be an excellent marksman.

Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, who had by this time joined the Quraysh group, went up to 'Amr and said:

"Son of my brother, put away your arrow and let me talk to you."

This 'Amr did and Abū Sufyān went on:

"What you have done is not prudent. You left with Zaynab in full view of the people. All the Arabs know the disasters we suffered at Badr at the hands of her father, Muḥammad. If you leave with his daughter in the open as you have done, the tribes would accuse us of cowardice and they would say that we have been humiliated. Return with her and ask her to stay in her husband's house for a few days so that people could say that we brought her back. Thereafter you can take her away quietly and secretly from us and take her to her father. We have no need to detain her."

'Amr agreed to this and Zaynab returned to Makkah. A few days later, in the middle of the night 'Amr took Zaynab and handed her over to the Prophet's emissaries just as his brother had instructed.

After the departure of his wife, Abū-l 'Āṣ stayed on in Makkah for several years. Then, shortly before the conquest of Makkah, he left for Syria on a trading mission. On the return journey from Syria his caravan consisted of some one hundred camels and one hundred and seventy men.

As the caravan approached Madinah, a detachment of

thousand dirhams, according to the wealth and social standing of the prisoner. Quraysh messengers went to and fro between Makkah and Madinah bearing the ransom money to free their relatives held in Madinah. Zaynab sent her messenger to Madinah bearing the ransom demand to free her husband. The ransom amount included a necklace which her mother, Khadijah, had given to her before she died. When the Prophet saw the necklace, his face at once became covered with a veil of sadness and he felt a surge of tenderness for his daughter. He turned to his companions and said:

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After the departure of his wife, Abū-l 'Āṣ stayed on in Makkah for several years. Then, shortly before the conquest of Makkah, he left for Syria on a trading mission. On the return journey from Syria his caravan consisted of some one hundred camels and one hundred and seventy men.

As the caravan approached Madinah, a detachment of

Muslims took them by surprise. They impounded the camels and took the men as captives to the Prophet. Abū-l 'Āṣ however managed to escape. During the night which was pitch black, Abū-l 'Āṣ entered Madīnah fearful and alert. He searched around until he came to Zaynab's house. He asked her for protection and she gave it to him.

At dawn, the Prophet, peace be on him, came out to the masjid to perform the Dawn Prayer. He stood erect in the mihrāb and said "*Allāhu Akbar*" to begin the Prayer. The Muslims behind him did the same. At that point Zaynab shouted from the women's section of the masjid:

"O people! I am Zaynab the daughter of Muḥammad. I have given protection to Abū-l 'Āṣ. Do give him your protection also."

When the Prayer was finished, the Prophet turned to the congregation and said: "Have you heard what I heard?"

"Yes, Messenger of God," they replied.

"By Him in Whose hand is my soul, I knew nothing of this until I heard what you heard. He is asking protection from the Muslims."

Back at home the Prophet said to his daughter: "Prepare a place of rest for Abū-l 'Āṣ and let him know that you are not lawful for him." He then summoned the men of the expeditionary force which had taken the camels and the men of the caravan and said to them:

"You have taken the possessions of this man. If you are kind to him and return his property, we would be pleased. If however you do not agree then the goods is booty sanctioned by God which you have a right to."

"We would certainly return his possessions to him, Messenger of God," they replied and when Abū-l 'Āṣ came to collect his goods, they said to him:

"You belong to the Quraysh nobility. You are the nephew of the Messenger of God and his son-in-law. Would you accept Islam? We would hand over all this wealth to you. You would then have for your own enjoyment whatever wealth and possessions the Makkans entrusted to you, and stay with us here in Madīnah."

"What an evil thing you are asking me to do, to enter a new religion while committing an act of treachery!" Abū-l 'Āṣ retorted.

Abū-l 'Āṣ returned to Makkah with the caravan and handed over all the wealth and goods to their rightful owners. Then he asked:

"O people of Quraysh! Is there any money left with me belonging to any one of you which he has not taken?"

"No," came the reply. "And may God bless you with goodness. We have indeed found you noble and trustworthy."

Then Abū-l 'Āṣ announced:

"Since I have now handed over to you what is rightfully yours, I now declare that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh. By God, the only thing that prevented me from declaring my acceptance of Islam while I was with Muḥammad in Madīnah was my fear that you would think that I did so only to appropriate your wealth. Now that I have discharged my trust in this matter, I now declare that I am a Muslim."

Abū-l 'Āṣ then left for Madīnah where the Prophet received him hospitably and returned his wife to him. The Prophet used to say about him:

"He spoke to me and was truthful to me. He made promises to me and remained faithful to his word."



28

Rumaysā' bint Milhān

Even before Islam was introduced to Yathrib, Rumaysā' was known for her excellent character, the power of her intellect and her independent attitude of mind. She was known by various names including Rumaysā' and Ghumaysā', but these were possibly nicknames. One historian says that her real name was Sahlah but later she was popularly known as Umm Sulaym.

Umm Sulaym was first married to Mālik ibn an-Nadr, and her son by this marriage was the famous Anas ibn Mālik, one of the great companions of the Prophet.

Umm Sulaym was one of the first women of Yathrib to accept Islam. She was influenced by the refined, dedicated and persuasive Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr who was sent out as the first missionary or ambassador of Islam by the noble Prophet. This was after the first pledge of 'Aqabah. Twelve men of Yathrib had gone to 'Aqabah on the outskirts of Makkah to pledge loyalty to the Prophet. This was the first major breakthrough for the mission of the Prophet for many years.

Umm Sulaym's decision to accept Islam was made without the knowledge or consent of her husband, Mālik ibn an-Nadr. He was absent from Yathrib at the time and

when he returned he felt some change had come over his household and asked his wife:

"Have you been rejuvenated?"

"No," she said, "but I (now) believe in this man (meaning the Prophet Muḥammad)."

Mālik was not pleased especially when his wife went on to announce her acceptance of Islam in public and instruct her son Anas in the teachings and practice of the new faith. She taught him to say *Ash hadu an lā ilāha illa Allāh* and *Ash hadu anna Muḥammada-r Rasūlullāh*. The young Anas repeated this simple but profound declaration of faith clearly and emphatically.

Umm Sulaym's husband was now furious. He shouted at her:

"Don't corrupt my son."

"I am not corrupting him," she replied firmly.

Her husband then left the house and it is reported that he was set upon by an enemy of his and was killed. The news shocked but apparently did not upset Umm Sulaym greatly. She remained devoted to her son Anas and was concerned about his proper upbringing. She is even reported to have said that she would not marry again unless Anas approved.

When it was known that Umm Sulaym had become a widow, one man, Zayd ibn Sahl, known as Abū Ṭalhah, resolved to become engaged to her before anyone else did.

He was rather confident that Umm Sulaym would not pass him over for another. He was after all a strong and virile person who was quite rich and who possessed an imposing house that was much admired. He was an accomplished horseman and a skilful archer and,

moreover, he belonged to the same clan as Umm Sulaym, the Banū an-Najjār.

Abū Ṭalḥah proceeded to Umm Sulaym's house. On the way he recalled that she had been influenced by the preaching of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr and had become a Muslim.

"So what?" he said to himself. "Was not her husband who died a firm adherent of the old religion and was he not opposed to Muḥammad and his mission?"

Abū Ṭalḥah reached Umm Sulaym's house. He asked and was given permission to enter. Her son Anas was present. Abū Ṭalḥah explained why he had come and asked for her hand in marriage.

"A man like you, Abū Ṭalḥah," she said, "is not (easily) turned away. But I shall never marry you while you are a *kāfir*, an unbeliever."

Abū Ṭalḥah thought she was trying to put him off and that perhaps she had already preferred someone wealthier and more influential. He said to her:

"What is it that really prevents you from accepting me, Umm Sulaym? Is it the yellow and the white metals?"

"Gold and silver?" she asked somewhat taken aback and in a slightly censuring tone.

"Yes," he said.

"I swear to you, Abū Ṭalḥah, and I swear to God and His Messenger that if you accept Islam, I shall be pleased to accept you as a husband, without any gold or silver. I shall consider your acceptance of Islam as my *mahr*."

Abū Ṭalḥah understood well the implications of her words. His mind turned to the idol he had made from wood and on which he lavished great attention in the same way that important men of his tribe venerated and

cared for their personal idols.

The opportunity was right for Umm Sulaym to stress the futility of such idol worship and she went on:

"Don't you know, Abū Ṭalḥah, that the god you worship besides Allāh grew from the earth?"

"That's true," he said.

"Don't you feel stupid while worshipping part of a tree while you use the rest of it for fuel to bake bread or warm yourself? (If you should give up these foolish beliefs and practices) and become a Muslim, Abū Ṭalḥah, I shall be pleased to accept you as a husband and I would not want from you any *ṣadaqah* apart from your acceptance of Islam."

"Who shall instruct me in Islam?" asked Abū Ṭalḥah.

"I shall," Umm Sulaym replied.

"How?"

"Utter the declaration of truth and testify that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh. Then go to your house, destroy your idol and throw it away."

Abū Ṭalḥah left and reflected deeply on what Umm Sulaym had said. He came back to her beaming with happiness.

"I have taken your advice to heart. I declare that there is no god but Allāh and I declare that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh."

Umm Sulaym and Abū Ṭalḥah were married. Anas, her son, was pleased and the Muslims would say:

"We have never yet heard of a *mahr* that was more valuable and precious than that of Umm Sulaym for she made Islam her *mahr*."

Umm Sulaym was pleased and delighted with her new

husband who placed his unique energies and talents in the service of Islam. He was one of the seventy-three men who swore allegiance to the Prophet at the second Pledge of 'Aqabah. With him, according to one report, was his wife Umm Sulaym. Two other women, the celebrated Nuṣaybah bint Ka'b and Asmā' bint 'Amr witnessed 'Aqabah and took the oath of allegiance to the Prophet.

Abū Ṭalḥah was devoted to the Prophet and took enormous delight in simply looking at him and listening to the sweetness of his speech. He participated in all the major military campaigns. He lived a very ascetic life and was known to fast for long periods at a time. It is said that he had a fantastic orchard in Madīnah with date palms and grapes and running water. One day while he was performing Ṣalāt in the shade of the trees, a beautiful bird with brightly coloured plumage flew in front of him. He became engrossed in the scene and forgot how many rak'ats he had prayed. Two? Three? When he completed the Prayer he went to the Prophet and described how he had been distracted. In the end, he said: "Bear witness, Messenger of God, that I hand over this orchard as a charity for the sake of God, the Exalted."

Abū Ṭalḥah and Umm Sulaym had an exemplary Muslim family life, devoted to the Prophet and the service of Muslims and Islam. The Prophet used to visit their home. Sometimes when the time of Prayer came, he would pray on a mat provided by Umm Sulaym. Sometimes also he would have a siesta in their house and, as he slept, she would wipe the perspiration from his forehead. Once when the Prophet awoke from his siesta, he asked:

"Umm Sulaym, what are you doing?"

"I am taking these (drops of perspiration) as a *barakah* (blessing) which comes from you," she replied.

At another time, the Prophet went to their house and Umm Sulaym offered him dates and butterfat but he did not have any of it because he was fasting. Occasionally, she would send her son Anas with bags of dates to his house.

It was noticed that the Prophet, peace be on him, had a special compassion for Umm Sulaym and her family and when asked about it, he replied:

"Her brother was killed beside me."

Umm Sulaym also had a well-known sister, Umm Ḥaram, the wife of the imposing 'Ubādah ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit. She died at sea during a naval expedition and was buried in Cyprus. Umm Sulaym's husband, Abū Ṭalḥah, also died while he was on a naval expedition during the time of the third Caliph, 'Uthmān, and was buried at sea.

Umm Sulaym herself was noted for her great courage and bravery. During the Battle of Uhud, she carried a dagger in the folds of her dress. She gave water to and tended the wounded and she made attempts to defend the Prophet when the tide of battle was turning against him. At the Battle of Khandaq, the Prophet saw her carrying a dagger and he asked her what she was doing with it. She said:

"It is to fight those who desert."

"May God grant you satisfaction in that," replied the Prophet.

In the face of adversity, Umm Sulaym displayed a unique calmness and strength. One of her young sons ('Umayr) fell sick and died while her husband was away looking after his orchards. She bathed the child and

wrapped him in shrouds. She told others at her home that they should not inform Abū Ṭalḥah because she herself wanted to tell him.

Umm Sulaym had another son whose name was ‘Abdullāh. A few days after she gave birth, she sent Anas with the baby and a bag of dates to the Prophet. The Prophet placed the baby on his lap. He crushed the dates in his mouth and put some in the baby’s mouth. The baby sucked the dates with relish and the Prophet said:

“The Anṣār are only fond of dates.”

‘Abdullāh eventually grew up and had seven children all of whom memorized the Qur’ān.

Umm Sulaym was a model Muslim, a model wife and mother. Her belief in God was strong and uncompromising. She was not prepared to endanger her faith and the upbringing of her children for wealth and luxury, however abundant and tempting.

She was devoted to the Prophet and dedicated her son Anas to his service. She took the responsibility of educating her children and she played an active part in public life, sharing with the other Muslims the hardships and the joys of building a community and living for the pleasure of God.



Talḥah ibn ‘Ubaydullāh

Returning to Makkah in haste after a trading trip to Syria, Ṭalḥah asked his family:

“Did anything happen in Makkah since we left?”

“Yes,” they replied. “Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh emerged alleging that he is a Prophet and Abū Quḥāfah (Abū Bakr) has followed him.”

“I used to know Abū Bakr,” said Ṭalḥah. “He is an easy-going, amiable, gentle man. He was an honest and upright trader. We were quite fond of him and loved sitting in his company because of his knowledge of Quraysh history and genealogy.”

Later, Ṭalḥah went to Abū Bakr and asked:

“Is it true what they say, that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh has appeared as a Prophet and that you follow him.”

“Yes,” replied Abū Bakr and went on to tell Ṭalḥah about Muḥammad and what a good thing it would be if he too followed him. Ṭalḥah in turn told Abū Bakr the story of his strange recent encounter with an ascetic in the market-place of Busra in Syria. The ascetic is said to have told Ṭalḥah that someone called “Ahmad” would appear in Makkah about that time and that he would be the last of the Prophets. He also told Ṭalḥah, so the story

goes, that the Prophet would leave the sacred precincts of Makkah and migrate to a land of black soil, water and palm trees.

Abū Bakr was astonished by the story and took Ṭalḥah to Muḥammad. The Prophet, peace be on him, explained Islam to Ṭalḥah and recited some portions of the Qur'ān to him. Ṭalḥah was enthusiastic. He related to the Prophet his conversation with the ascetic of Busra. There and then, Ṭalḥah pronounced the *Shahādah* - that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh. He was the fourth person who had been introduced to Islam by Abū Bakr.

The Quraysh were astounded by the young Ṭalḥah's acceptance of Islam. The one who was most dismayed and unhappy was his mother. She had hoped that he would one day be a leader in his community because of his noble character and his outstanding virtues. Some of the Quraysh, anxious and worried, went to Ṭalḥah as soon as they could to wean him away from his new religion but found him firm and unshakeable as a rock. When they despaired of using gentle persuasion to achieve their aim, they resorted to persecution and violence. The following story is related by Mas'ūd ibn Kharāsh:

"While I was making *sa'y* between aṣ-Ṣafa and al-Marwah, there appeared a crowd of people pushing a young man whose hands were tied behind his back. As they rushed behind him, they rained down blows on his head. In the crowd was an old woman who lashed him repeatedly and shouted abuses at him.

I asked:

'What's the matter with this young man?'

'This is Ṭalḥah ibn 'Ubaydullāh. He gave up his religion

and now follows the Banū Hāshim man.'

'And who is the woman behind him?' I asked.

'She is as-Sa'bah bint al-Ḥaḍramī, the young man's mother,' they said.

The Quraysh did not stop there. Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid, nicknamed the 'lion of the Quraysh' bound Ṭalḥah with a rope and with the same rope he tied up Abū Bakr and then handed them over to the mindless and violent mob of Makkah to be beaten and tortured. The shared experience no doubt drew Ṭalḥah and Abū Bakr closer together!

Years passed and events of great significance took place. Ṭalḥah grew in stature as he bore the pain and suffering of being tested in the path of God and His Prophet. He gained the unique reputation among Muslims of being called the "living martyr". The Prophet, peace be on him, also called him "Ṭalḥah the Good" and "Ṭalḥah the Generous".

The name of the "living martyr" was earned during the Battle of Uḥud. Ṭalḥah had missed the Battle of Badr. He and Sa'id ibn Zayd had been sent outside Madīnah on a mission by the Prophet and when they returned, the Prophet and his companions were already on the way back from Badr. They were both sad at having missed the opportunity of taking part in the first campaign with the Prophet but were tremendously pleased when he told them they would get the same reward as those who actually fought.

At the Battle of Uḥud, when the Muslims fell into disarray at the beginning of hostilities the Prophet became dangerously exposed. There were about eleven men of the Anṣār at his side and one Muhājir - Ṭalḥah ibn

'Ubaydullāh. The Prophet clambered up the mountain hotly pursued by some mushrikīn. The Prophet, peace be on him, shouted:

"The one who repulses these people from us will be my companion in Paradise."

"I, O Messenger of God," shouted Ṭalḥah.

"No, stick to your position," replied the Prophet. A man from the Anṣār volunteered and the Prophet agreed. He fought until he was killed. The Prophet went further up the mountain with the mushrikīn still in close pursuit.

"Isn't there someone to combat these?"

Ṭalḥah again volunteered but the Prophet ordered him to maintain his position. Another person immediately came forward, fought and was killed. This happened until all who stood by the Prophet were martyred except Ṭalḥah.

"Now, yes," signalled the Prophet and Ṭalḥah went into battle. By this time, the Prophet's teeth had been broken, his forehead had been slashed, his lips had been wounded and blood was streaming down his face. He was drained of energy. Ṭalḥah plunged into the enemy and pushed them away from the Prophet. He turned back to the Prophet and helped him a little further up the mountain and put him to lie on the ground. He then renewed his attack and successfully repulsed the enemy.

About this occasion Abū Bakr said:

"At that moment, Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ and I were far from the Prophet. When we came close to him to render assistance to him, the Prophet said:

'Leave me and go to your companion (meaning Ṭalḥah).'"

There was Ṭalḥah, bleeding profusely. He had numerous wounds, from sword, spear and arrow. His foot had been

cut and he had fallen into a hollow where he lay unconscious.

Thereafter, the Prophet, peace be on him, said:

"Whoever is pleased to see a man still walking on earth who had completed his span (of life), let him look at Ṭalḥah ibn 'Ubaydallāh."

And, whenever Uḥud was recalled, aṣ-Ṣiddīq, may God be pleased with him, would say:

"That day, that entire day, belonged to Ṭalḥah."

That was the story of how Ṭalḥah came to be called the "living martyr".

There were several incidents which led to him being called "Ṭalḥah the Good" and "Ṭalḥah the Generous".

Ṭalḥah was an astute and successful merchant who travelled widely to the north and south of the Arabian peninsula. It is said that after one of his trips to Ḥaḍramawt, he had profits amounting to some seven hundred thousand dirhams. His nights would be anxious and worried on account of this vast wealth. On one such night, his wife, Umm Kulthūm the daughter of Abū Bakr, said to him:

"What's wrong with you, O father of Muḥammad? Perhaps I have done something to hurt you?"

"No," replied Ṭalḥah. "You are a wonderful wife for a Muslim man. But I have been thinking since last night: How can a man think of his Lord and Sustainer when he goes to sleep with this wealth in his house?"

"Why should it bother you so much?" remarked Umm Kulthūm. "What about all the needy ones in your community and all your friends? When you get up in the morning share it out among them."

"God bless you. You are really marvellous, the daughter

of a marvellous man,” said Ṭalḥah to his wife.

In the morning, Ṭalḥah gathered up the money in bags and distributed it among the poor Muhājirīn and Anṣār.

It is related that a man came up to Ṭalḥah requesting help and also mentioning some common family connection between them.

“This family connection someone has mentioned to me before,” said Ṭalḥah who was in fact known for his generosity to all members of his clan. Ṭalḥah told the man that he had just sold a piece of land to ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān for several thousand dirhams. The man could have the money or the land which could be re-purchased from ‘Uthmān. The man opted for the money and Ṭalḥah gave it all to him.

Ṭalḥah was well-known for helping persons who had debt problems, heads of families who experienced hardship, and widows. One of his friends, aṣ-Ṣa‘īb ibn Zayd, said of him:

“I accompanied Ṭalḥah ibn ‘Ubaydallāh on journeys and I stayed with him at home and I have not found anyone who was more generous with money, with clothes and with food than Ṭalḥah.”

No wonder he was called “Ṭalḥah the Good” and “Ṭalḥah the Generous”.

The name Ṭalḥah is also connected with the first *fitnah* or civil war among Muslims after the death of the prophet, peace be on him.

The seeds of trouble were sown during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. There were many complaints and accusations against him. Some mischief-makers were not content with accusations only but were determined to finish him off. In the year 35 AH (656 CE) a group of

insurgents stormed ‘Uthmān’s house and murdered him while he was reading the Qur’ān. It was one of the most shocking events in the early history of Islam.

‘Alī was persuaded to accept the responsibility of the Caliphate and all Muslims swore allegiance to him, including Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām. Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr were deeply shocked by the murder of ‘Uthmān. They were horrified and felt strongly that the murderers should be punished and that justice should be done. But the punishment of the murderers was not an easy task in as much as the crime was not just the work of a few individuals but involved a large number of persons.

Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr sought ‘Alī’s permission to go to Makkah to perform ‘umrah. They met ‘Ā’ishah, the wife of the Prophet. She was greatly shocked when she heard of the assassination of ‘Uthmān. From Makkah, Ṭalḥah, az-Zubayr and ‘Ā’ishah set off for Baṣrah where large numbers were gathering to seek revenge for the death of ‘Uthmān.

The forces gathered at Baṣrah seemed to present an open challenge to ‘Alī. As the caliph of the Muslims and the head of the entire Muslim State, he could not tolerate any insurrection or armed revolt against the State. But what a difficult and awesome task he faced! To deal with the revolt, he had to confront his brothers, his companions and his friends - followers of the Prophet and his religion, those who often fought side by side with him against the forces of shirk, those whom he respected and loved.

The forces clamouring for vengeance for ‘Uthmān and those supporting ‘Alī met at a place called Kuraybah, near Baṣrah. ‘Alī desired to avoid war and settle matters

by peaceful means. He used every means at his disposal to achieve peace. He clung to every hope of avoiding confrontation. But the dark forces at work against Islam and how numerous were these, were determined that matters should come to a terrible and bloody end.

'Alī wept. He wept bitterly when he saw 'Ā'ishah, the "Mother of the Believers" in her *hawdaj* or palanquin astride a camel at the head of the army which now emerged to fight him. And when he saw Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr, two close companions of the Prophet, in the midst of the army, he shouted to them to come out to him. They did and 'Alī said to Ṭalḥah:

"O Ṭalḥah, have you come with the wife of the Messenger of Allāh to fight along with her...?"

And to az-Zubayr he said:

"O az-Zubayr, I implore you, by God, do you remember the day when the Prophet, peace be on him, passed by you and we were in such and such a place and he asked you: 'Do you love 'Alī?' and you said: 'Why shouldn't I love my cousin and one who follows my religion...?'"

'Alī continued talking to them reminding them of the bonds of brotherhood and faith. In the end both Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr withdrew from participation in this civil war. They withdrew immediately when they saw the situation in a different light. But they paid for that withdrawal with their lives.

As they withdrew, a man named 'Amr ibn Jarmūz followed az-Zubayr and cowardly murdered him while he performed Ṣalāt. Ṭalḥah was killed by an arrow allegedly shot by Marwān - a cousin of 'Uthmān who was too blinded by rage and the desire to seek revenge for his kinsman to respond to the possibility of avoiding

war and bloodshed among Muslims.

The murder of 'Uthmān had become Ṭalḥah's tryst with destiny. He did not participate in the fighting and killing that followed that came to be known in history as the "Battle of the Camel". Indeed, if he had known that the fitnah would have degenerated into such insane hatred and bitterness and resulted in such a bloody outcome, he would have resisted it. He was not keen to fight 'Alī. He was simply appalled by the murder of 'Uthmān and wanted to see justice done. Before the beginning of the battle he had said in a voice choked with emotion:

"O Lord, for the sake of 'Uthmān, take from me this day until You are pleased."

Then when 'Alī faced him and az-Zubayr, they saw the correctness of his position and withdrew from the field of battle. Yet, in these difficult circumstances, martyrdom was reserved for them.

The Battle of the Camel came to an end. 'Ā'ishah, the mother of the believers, realized that she had precipitated matters and left Baṣrah for the Sacred Mosque and then to Madinah distancing herself from the conflict. 'Alī provided well for her journey giving her all the comfort and honour due to her.

When the numerous dead from the battle were brought together, 'Alī led the funeral prayer for them all, those who were with him and those who were against him. And when he had finished burying Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr he bade farewell to them with a heavy heart, a heart filled with tenderness and love.

"I really hope," he said in simple and sublime words, "that Ṭalḥah, az-Zubayr, 'Uthmān and I will be among those of whom God has said: 'And We shall remove

from their hearts any lurking sense of injury and rancour; they will be brothers joyfully facing each other on thrones of dignity.” (The *Qur’ān*, Sūrah al-Ḥijr, 15: 47).

Then he looked tenderly and sorrowfully on the graves of his brothers in faith and said:

“I have heard with these two ears of mine the Messenger of Allāh, may Allāh bless him and grant him peace, saying:

“Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr are my companions in Paradise!”



‘Uqbah ibn ‘Āmir

After a long and exhausting journey, the Prophet, peace be on him, is at last on the outskirts of Yathrib. The good people of the city go out to meet him. Many crowd the narrow streets. Some stand on roof-tops chanting *Lā ilāha illa Allāh* and *Allāhu Akbar* in sheer joy at meeting the Prophet of Mercy and his loyal companion, Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddiq. The small girls of the city come out gaily beating their *daffs* and singing the words of welcome:

*Ṭala‘a-l badru ‘alaynā
Min Thanīyāti-l Wadā’
Wajaba-sh shukru ‘alaynā
Mā da‘ā lillāhi dā’
Ayyuha-l mab‘ūthu fīnā
Ji’ta bi-l amri-l muṭā’
Ji’ta sharrafta-l Madīnah
Marḥaban yā khayra-d dā’.*

“The full moon has come upon us.
From beyond the hills of Thanīyāti-l Wadā’
Grateful we must be.
For what to God he calls!

O you who has been sent among us!
 You came with a mission to be obeyed.
 You came, you honoured the city -
 Welcome, O best of those who call (to God)."

As the procession of the blessed Prophet wended its way, all around there were joyful hearts, tears of ecstasy, smiles of sheer happiness.

Far away from these scenes of jubilation and delight was a young man named 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir al-Juhānī. He had gone out to the *bawādī*, the open expanses of desert, to graze his flocks of sheep and goats on the sparse vegetation. He had wandered far in search of fodder for his hungry flock. It was difficult to find suitable grazing grounds and he was constantly afraid that his flock would perish. They were all he possessed and he did not want to lose them.

The happiness which engulfed Yathrib, henceforth to be known as the radiant city of the Prophet, soon spread to the near and distant *bawādī* and reached every nook and corner of the land. The good news of the Prophet's arrival finally reached 'Uqbah as he tended his flocks far away in the inhospitable desert. His response to the news was immediate as he himself relates:

"The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, came to Madīnah while I was tending my sheep. When I heard the news of his coming, I set out to meet him without delay. When I met him I asked:

'Will you accept my pledge of allegiance, O Messenger of God?'

'And who are you?' asked the Prophet.

'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir al-Juhani,' I replied.

'Which do you prefer,' he asked, 'the pledge of a nomad or the pledge of someone who has migrated?'

'The pledge of someone who has migrated,' I said.

So the Messenger of God took the same pledge from me as he did from the Muhājirīn. I spent the night with him and then went back to my flock.

There were twelve of us who had accepted Islam but we lived far from the city tending our sheep and goats in the open country. We came to the conclusion that it would be good for us if we went to the Prophet daily, so that he could instruct us in our religion and recite for us whatever revelation he had received from on high. I told the others:

'Take turns to go to the Messenger of God, peace be on him. Anyone going may leave his sheep with me because I am too worried and concerned about my own flock to leave them in the care of someone else.'

Each day, one after another of my friends went to the Prophet, leaving his sheep for me to look after. When each returned, I learnt from him what he had heard and benefited from what he had understood. Before long, however, I returned to my senses and said to myself:

'Woe to you! Is it because of a flock of sheep that you remain thin and wretched and lose the opportunity to be in the company of the Prophet and to speak directly to him without an intermediary?' With this, I left my flock, went to Madīnah and stayed in the masjid close to the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace."

'Uqbah had no reason to regret having taken this fateful decision. Within a decade, he had become one of the outstanding scholars among the companions of the Prophet, a competent and beautiful reciter of the Qur'ān,

a military commander and later on one of the eminent Muslim governors as Islam spread east and west with astonishing rapidity. He could never have imagined as he left his flock to follow the teachings of the noble Prophet, that he would have been among the vanguard of the Muslim forces that liberated fertile Damascus - then known as the "mother of the universe" and that he would have a house for himself among its verdant gardens. He could never have imagined that he would be one of the commanders who liberated Egypt, then known as the "emerald of the world", and that he would be one of its governors.

The fateful decision however was taken. Alone, without possessions or relatives, 'Uqbah came to Madinah from the *bawādī*. He stayed with others like him on the *Şuffah* or elevated part of the Prophet's mosque, near his house. The *Şuffah* was like a reception point where people like 'Uqbah would go because they wanted to be close to the Prophet. They were known as the "*Aşhāb aş-Şuffah*" and the Prophet once described them as the "guests of Islam".

Because they had no income, the Prophet always shared his food with them and encouraged others to be generous to these "guests". They spent much of their time studying the Qur'ān and learning about Islam. What a marvellous opportunity they had! They were in close and regular contact with the Prophet. He had a special love and concern for them and took care to educate them and look after them in all respects. 'Uqbah gave an example of how the Prophet trained and taught them. He said:

"One day, the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, came out to us while we were on the *Şuffah* and asked:

'Which of you would like to go out to the open country or a valley every day and fetch for himself two beautiful, black camels?' (Such camels were considered prize possessions.)

'Everyone of us would like that, O Messenger of God,' we all replied.

'Now,' he said, 'each one of you should go to the mosque and learn two *āyāt* (verses) of the Book of God. This is better for him than two camels; three verses are better than three camels; four verses are better than four camels (and so on)."

In this way, the Prophet tried to bring about a change in attitudes among those who had accepted Islam, a change from obsession with acquiring worldly possessions to an attitude of devotion to knowledge. His simple example provided them with motivation and a powerful incentive to acquire knowledge.

On other occasions, the *Aşhāb aş-Şuffah* would ask questions of the Prophet in order to understand their religion better. Once, 'Uqbah said, he asked the Prophet, "What is salvation?" and he replied:

"Control your tongue, make your house spacious for guests and spurn your mistakes."

Even outside the mosque, 'Uqbah tried to stay close to the Prophet. On journeys, he often took the reins of the Prophet's mule and went wherever the Prophet desired. Sometimes he followed directly behind the Prophet, peace be on him, and so came to be called the *redif* of the Prophet. On some occasions, the Prophet would descend from his mount and allow 'Uqbah to ride while he himself walked. 'Uqbah described one such occasion:

"I took hold of the reins of the Prophet's mule while

passing through some palm groves of Madīnah.

‘Uqbah,’ the Prophet said to me, ‘don’t you want to ride?’

I thought of saying ‘no’ but I felt there might be an element of disobedience to the Prophet in such a reply so I said:

‘Yes, O Prophet of God.’

The Prophet then got down from his mule and I mounted in obedience to his command. He began to walk. Shortly afterwards I dismounted. The Prophet mounted again and said to me:

‘Uqbah, shall I not teach you two *sūrahs* the like of which has not been heard before.’?

‘Certainly, O Messenger of God,’ I replied. And so he recited to me *Qul a‘ūdhu bi rabbi-l Falaq* and *Qul a‘ūdhu bi rabbi-n nās* (the last two *sūrahs* of the Qur’ān). I then said the *Iqāmah* for Ṣalāt. The Prophet led the Ṣalāt and recited these two *sūrahs*. (Afterwards), he said:

‘Read both these *sūrahs* when you go to sleep and whenever you wake up.’

The above instances show “continuous education” at its best - at home, in the mosque, riding and walking in the open school of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace.

Two objectives occupied ‘Uqbah’s attention throughout his life; the search for knowledge and *jihād* in the path of God. He applied his energies totally to these objectives.

In the field of learning, he drank deeply from the fountain of knowledge that was the Messenger of God, peace be on him. ‘Uqbah became a distinguished *muqri*’ (reciter of the Qur’ān), a *muḥaddith* (recorder and narrator of the sayings of the Prophet); a *faqīh* (jurist); a *farā’idī*

(expert on the Islamic laws of inheritance); an *adīb* (literateur); a *faṣīh* (orator) and a *shā‘ir* (poet).

In reciting the Qur’ān, he had a most pleasant and beautiful voice. In the stillness of the night, when the entire universe seems peaceful and tranquil, he would turn to the Book of God, and recite its overpowering verses. The hearts of the noble companions would be drawn to his recitation. Their whole being would be shaken and they would be moved to tears from the fear of God which his recitation induced.

One day ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb invited him and said:

“Recite for me something from the Book of God, O ‘Uqbah.”

“At your command, O Amīr al-Mu‘minīn,” said ‘Uqbah and began reciting. ‘Umar wept till his beard was wet.

‘Uqbah left a copy of the Qur’ān written in his own hand. It is said that this copy of the Qur’ān existed until quite recently in Egypt in the well-known mosque named after ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Āmir himself. At the end of this text was written: “‘Uqbah ibn ‘Āmir al-Juḥanī wrote it.” This *Muṣ-ḥaf* of ‘Uqbah was one of the earliest copies of the Qur’ān in existence but it was lost in its entirety with other priceless documents due to the carelessness of Muslims.

In the field of *Jihād*, it is sufficient to know that ‘Uqbah fought beside the Prophet, peace be on him, at the Battle of Uhūd and in all the military engagements thereafter. He was also one of the valiant and daring group of shock troopers who were tested to their maximum during the battle for Damascus. In recognition for his outstanding services, the commander of the Muslim forces then, Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ, despatched ‘Uqbah to Madīnah

to convey the good news of the liberation of Damascus to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. 'Uqbah spent eight days and seven nights, from Friday to Friday, in a continuous forced march to bring the news to 'Umar.

'Uqbah was one of the commanders of the Muslim forces that liberated Egypt. For three years he was the Muslim governor of Egypt after which he received orders from the Caliph Mu'āwiyah to mount a naval expedition to the island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean Sea.

An indication of 'Uqbah's enthusiasm for jihād is the fact that he committed to memory the sayings of the Prophet on this subject and became a specialist in narrating them to the Muslims. One of his favourite pastimes was to practice the skill of spear throwing.

'Uqbah was in Egypt when he became fatally ill. He gathered his children together and gave them his final advice. He said:

"My children, guard against three things:

Don't accept any saying attributed to the Prophet, peace be on him, except from a reliable authority. Do not incur debts or take up a loan even if you are in the position of an *imām*. Don't compose poetry for your hearts might be distracted thereby from the Qur'ān."

'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir al-Juḥanī, the *qāri'*, the *ālim*, the *ghāzī*, died in Cairo and was buried at the foot of the Muqattam hills.

Note on the Spelling and Pronunciation of Arabic Names

In pronouncing Arabic words, it is important to keep short vowels short and to lengthen long vowels.

Long vowels have been transcribed as follows:

ā as in salām - pronounced salaam

Ā as in Āminah - pronounced Aaminah

ī as in shahīd - pronounced shaheed

Ī as in Īmān - pronounced Eemaan

ū as sujūd - pronounced sujood

Heavy consonants

A dot is placed under certain letters to denote special Arabic consonants which are pronounced with a thick or heavy sound:

Ṣ or ṣ for the letter Ṣād as in Ṣalāt

Ḍ or ḍ for the letter Ḍād as in Wuḍū'

Ṭ or ṭ for the letter Ṭā' as in Ṭālib

Ẓ or ẓ for the letter Ẓā' as in Ẓuhr.

Ḥ or ḥ for the letter Ḥā' as in Ḥajj (pronounced with a strong expulsion of breath).

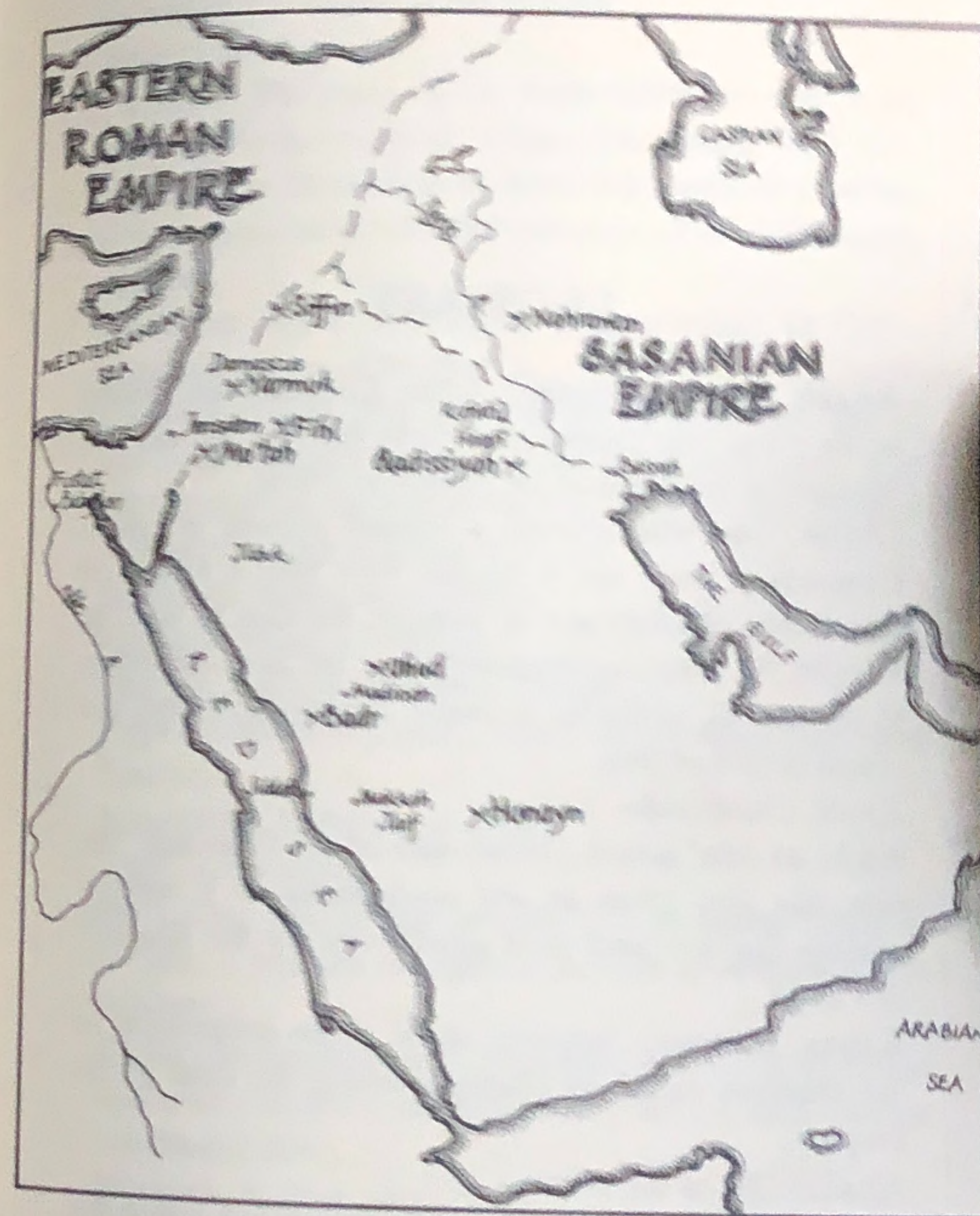
An open inverted comma (') represents the letter 'Ayn, as in 'Abd, 'Umar, 'Ikrimah.

A closed inverted comma (') represents the Ḥamzah, as in Mu'min.

Arabic is very precise and if you are in doubt about the pronunciation of any Arabic word, do seek the help of an Arabic speaker.



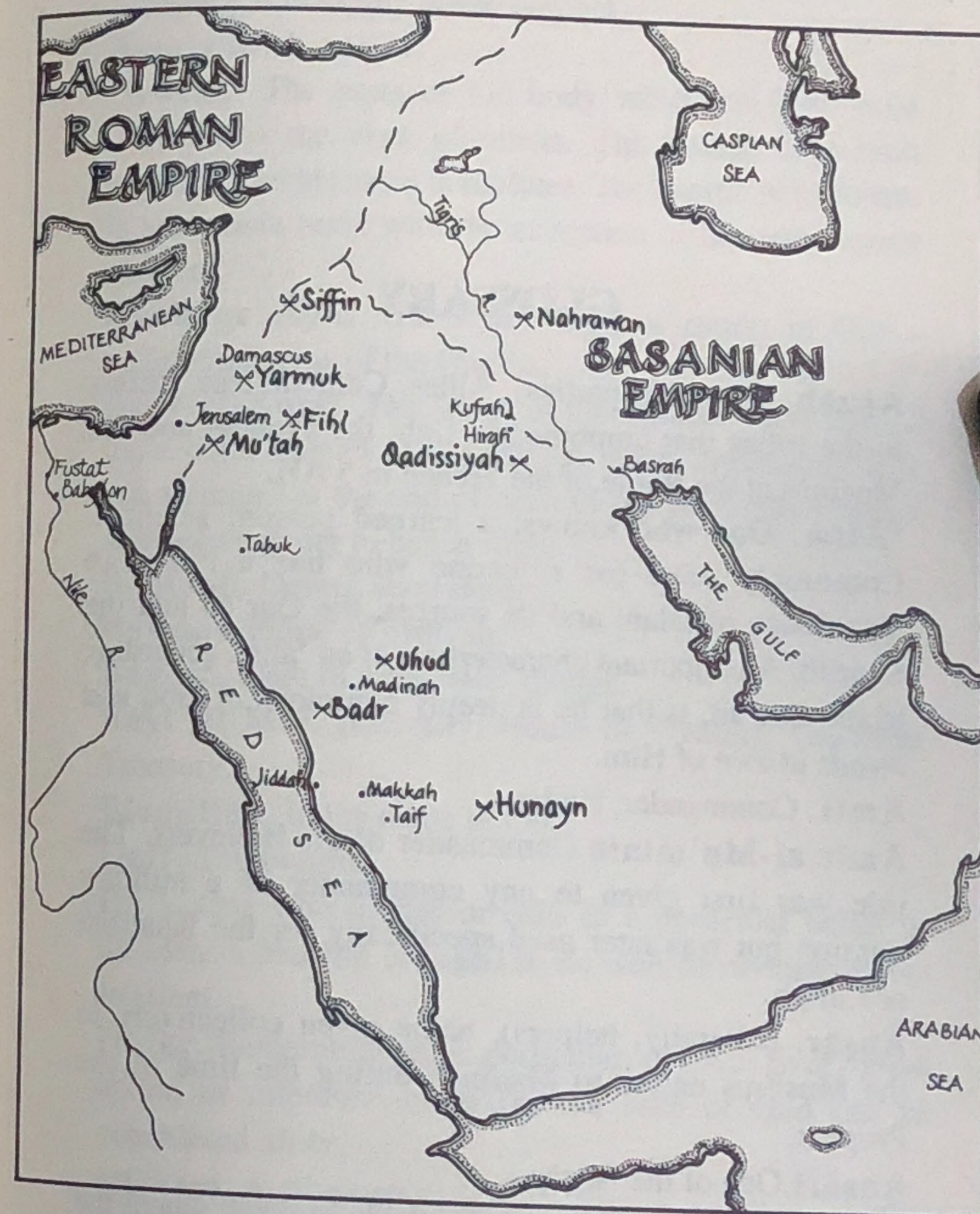
Towns (●) and tribes (▲) in the time of the Prophet.



Major Battles in Early Muslim History.



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GLOSSARY

Aḥzāb. (Literally, parties). Allies, Confederates. Refers to the tribes that combined to fight the Prophet and the Muslims at the Battle of the Trench in 5 AH.

‘Ālim. One who knows; a learned person; scientist. Commonly used for someone who has a thorough knowledge of Islam and its sources, the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. An important characteristic of an ‘ālim, according to the Qur’ān, is that he is deeply conscious of God and stands in awe of Him.

Amīr. Commander, leader.

Amīr al-Mu’minīn. Commander of the Believers. The title was first given to any commander of a military mission but was later used specifically for the Khalīfah or Caliph.

Anṣār. (Literally, helpers), name given collectively to the Muslims native to Madīnah during the time of the Prophet.

Anṣārī. One of the Anṣār.

‘Aqabah. Place in Mina, just outside Makkah where the first Muslims from Yathrib (Madīnah) pledged allegiance to the Prophet before the Hijrah.

‘Aṣabīyah. Tribal loyalty, partisanship; group solidarity;

racism; nationalism. Whoever advocates, fights for or dies for ‘aṣabīyah does not belong to the Muslim community, according to a saying of the Prophet.

Awqīyah. A weight.

‘Awrah. The parts of the body which are not to be exposed to the view of others. The ‘awrah of a man extends from his navel to his knee. The ‘awrah of a woman is her whole body with the exception of her face, hands and feet.

Āyah or Āyat. (Pl. Āyāt). Sign or aspect of God’s creation; a verse of the Qur’ān.

Āyat-ul-Kursī. The Verse of the Throne, verse 256 of the second chapter of the Qur’ān, sūrah al-Baqarah. It is often recited at the end of each of the five daily Prayers and before going to bed at night.

Bādiyah. Desert, semi-desert.

Bawādī. Plural of bādiyah.

Bay’ah. Oath of allegiance, pledge.

Bayt al-Māl. (Literally, House of Wealth). The State Treasury.

Bismillāh. In the name of God.

Daff. Tambourine.

Dā’ī. One who invites or calls to a particular belief or mission; a Muslim engaged in *da’wah* or inviting others to Islam.

Dhikr. Remembrance, in particular, of God. Every good action or utterance made for the sake of God can be considered *dhikr*.

Dirham. A silver coin.

Du‘ā’. A supplication or prayer.

Du‘at. Plural of dā’ī.

Faqīh. (Literally, one who understands well). Legist,

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Dirham. A silver coin.

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Du‘at. Plural of dā‘ī.

Faqīh. (Literally, one who understands well). Legist,

expert in Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

Fārūq (al-). The one who distinguishes truth from falsehood. Name given to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second Khalīfah.

Fiqh. Islamic law and jurisprudence.

Fitnah. Temptation, trial; intrigue; sedition, riot; civil strife or war; tumult, oppression, persecution.

Ghāzī. One who goes on a military expedition, warrior; Muslim soldier.

Ḥadīth. Saying of the Prophet.

Ḥajj. (Literally, effort). Pilgrimage to the House of God in Makkah which is compulsory on every Muslim who has the means to perform the journey, once in a life-time.

Ḥalīf. An ally or confederate of a tribe. He enjoys the security of the tribe but does not belong to it by blood.

Ḥalāl. That which is lawful or permissible in Islamic law. Only that which is good and beneficial for man and creation is regarded as ḥalāl.

Ḥarām. That which is unlawful or forbidden in Islamic law. Only that which is bad and harmful for man and creation is regarded as ḥarām.

Hawdaj. Camel litter, howdah, palanquin.

Hijrah. Migration. The act of leaving a place to seek sanctuary or freedom of worship in another or for any other purpose. Also the act of leaving a bad practice to adopt a righteous way of life.

Specifically, the Hijrah refers to the Prophet's journey from Makkah to Madīnah in the month of Rabī al-Awwal in the Twelfth year of his mission corresponding to June

622 C.E. The Muslim calendar begins with this event.

Ḥudūd. (Plural of *ḥadd*). Literally, limits or boundaries. Refers to the limits which God has set which man must

not transgress or violate. If someone violates them, he is to be punished according to certain fixed penalties. These penalties are also called ḥudūd.

Īmān. Faith based on knowledge; firm belief and trust in God which is the natural and reasonable attitude for man to adopt.

Iqāmah. (Literally, establishing). A formula similar to the *adhān* with addition of the phrase *Qad qāmati-ṣ Ṣalāt* (repeated twice) which signifies that a compulsory prayer is about to begin.

Istighfār. Seeking God's forgiveness is an important part of Islamic character training.

Jāhilī. (Literally, ignorant). Applies to attitudes, practices, individuals or societies which are immoral unjust and un-Islamic.

Jāhiliyah. (Literally, ignorance). The name given to the period immediately preceding the beginning of the Prophet's mission sometimes rendered as pre-Islamic or pre-Qur'ānic times.

Jihād. (Literally, striving). Any earnest striving in the way of God, involving either personal effort, material resources or arms, for righteousness and against evil, wrong-doing and oppression. Where it involves armed struggle, it must be for the defence of the Muslim community or just war to protect even non-Muslims from evil, oppression and tyranny.

Ka'bah. A cube-shaped structure in Makkah which is described in the Qur'ān as the first house of worship built for mankind.

Kāfir. One who is ungrateful to God and refuses to submit to Him; a disbeliever.

Khalīfah. Successor. At first it referred to the successor

of the Prophet, Abū Bakr. Later it came to be used as the designation for the head of the Muslim State. Anglicised as Caliph.

Khandaq. Trench.

Khaṭīb. Speaker, orator. One who delivers a khutbah or sermon.

Khuṭbah. Speech, sermon.

Kuffār. Plural of Kāfir.

Kufr. Ingratitude to God and disbelief in Him and His religion.

Lāt (al-). An object of worship, a chief goddess in the pagan Arabs' pantheon in the days of Jāhiliyah.

Labbayk. "Here I am, at your command." (see also *Talbiyah*)

Maghāzī. Military expeditions; the military campaigns of the Prophet.

Mahr. Dowry. Amount given by the bridegroom to the bride as part of the Muslim marriage contract.

Marwah (al-). A mound not far from the Ka'bah described in the Qur'ān as one of the 'symbols' of God. See also *aṣ-Ṣafā* and *as-Sa'y*.

Masjid. A place of prostration; a mosque.

Masjid al-Ḥaram. The mosque of the Sanctuary of Makkah or the Sacred Mosque.

Mawlā. (Pl. *mawālī*) This word has two meanings, one the exact opposite of the other: the protector and the protected one. Someone of slave origin who did not have the benefit of tribal connection.

Mawlāya. (Literally, my protector or patron) A form of address to a ruler.

Minbar. Raised platform in a mosque from which the khutbah is delivered.

Muhājir. A person who undertakes *hijrah* (see above).

Muhājirūn & Muhājirīn. Plurals of *muhājir*.

Mu'min. One who possesses *īmān* or deep faith and trust in God.

Munāfiq. (Pl. *Munāfiqūn* and *Munāfiqīn*). Hypocrite. Considered to be worse and more dangerous than a *kāfir*.

Murābiṭ. Someone who is posted or stationed; a person "at large" propagating Islam.

Muṣ-ḥaf. A copy of the Qur'ān.

Mushrik. One who associates others in worship with God, thus committing the grave the sin of *shirk*.

Mushrikūn & Mushrikīn. Plural of *mushrik*.

Mustaḍ'afīn. Weak and oppressed persons.

Qāri'. Reciter of the Qur'ān.

Qiblah. Direction or orientation for Ṣalāt i.e. towards the Ka'bah in Makkah.

Qiṣāṣ. Just retaliation, but the Qur'ān recommends remitting the right to retaliation as an act of charity. (See *The Qur'ān*, 5: 48).

Quḍāh. (Plural of *Qādī*) Judges.

Rasulullāh. The Messenger of God.

Rifādah. The duty of acting as host to needy persons performing pilgrimage and providing them with food and lodging.

Rukū'. Genuflexion. The posture in Ṣalāt with hands placed on knees.

Ṣadāq. Another word for *mahr* (see above).

Sadaqah. Charity.

Ṣafā (aṣ-). A mound not far from the Ka'bah described in the Qur'ān as one of the "symbols" of God. See also *al-Marwah* and *as-Sa'y*.

Sa'y (as-). (Literally, effort). The act of going seven

times between aṣ-Ṣafa and al-Marwah performed during pilgrimage to commemorate Hājar's desperate search for water for her son, Ismā'il.

✓ **Ṣahābah.** Companions. Plural of Ṣahābī.

✓ **Sayyid.** Leader, chieftain.

Shahādah. Testimony; declaration of faith; martyrdom. The words of the Shahādah are: *Ash-hadu an lā ilāha illa Allāh wa ash-hadu anna Muḥammada-r Rasūlullāh* - I testify that there is no god but Allāh and I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh.

Shahīd. Witness, martyr (one who bears witness with his life).

✓ **Sharī'ah.** Islamic law. The moral and legal code of Islam.

Shirk. Associating other gods - or any object of regard - with God; the gravest sin.

Sirwāl. A long under garment.

Siwāk. A piece of branch or the root of a tree (in Arabia the Arāk tree) used as a toothbrush. Also referred to as miswāk.

Ṣuffah. (Literally, raised platform or ledge). Part of the Prophet's Mosque in Madīnah which was a sort of reception point for poor Muslims and newcomers to the city.

Ṣuḥuf. (Plural of Ṣahīfah). Pages, manuscripts.

Sujūd. Prostration. A position during Ṣalāt.

✓ **Sunnah.** (Literally, path). The example of the Prophet which includes what he said, what he did and what he agreed to.

Sūrah. A chapter of the Qur'ān. There are 114 sūrahs in the Qur'ān.

✓ **Tahajjud.** From the verb meaning "to stay awake at night, to spend the night in prayer". The Tahajjud Prayer

is an optional prayer performed any time between Ṣalāt al-'Ishā' and the Dawn prayer. The Prophet performed Tahajjud often and encouraged his followers to do so.

Talbīyah. The refrain - *Labbayk Allāhumma Labbayk* etc. - repeated by pilgrims performing the Ḥajj.

Tawāf. Circumbulation of the Ka'bah seven times in an anti-clockwise direction.

Taqwā. Consciousness of God; being careful not to transgress the limits of God; an important quality of a true Muslim comprised of love and fear of God and a desire to merit His pleasure and avoid His displeasure.

Thawāb. Blessing, reward.

Ummah. Community, nation. Specifically, the Community of Believers or the universal Muslim community.

Umm al-Mu'minīn. (Literally, Mother of the Believers. Plural: Ummahāt al Mu'minīn). Term used to describe a wife of the Prophet. The status of the Prophet's wives as the mothers of the believers (see *The Qur'ān*, 33: 6) implied that they could not remarry after his death, since all believers were spiritually their "children" and they were worthy of the believers' respect and consideration.

'Umrah. The lesser pilgrimage which is optional and which can be performed at any time during the year.

'Uzza (al-). An object of worship, a chief goddess in the Arabs' pantheon during the days of Jāhiliyah.

Wakīl. Agent, authorised representative, proxy.

Walī. Friend and protector, legal guardian.

Walimah. Wedding feast partly serving as a public announcement of a marriage.

Wuḍū'. Purification that must precede the Ṣalāt or Prayer or such acts as the reading of the Qur'ān.

Zakāt. The compulsory "purifying" tax on wealth which is one of the pillars of Islam.

CHRONOLOGY

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 545 CE | Birth of 'Abdullāh, father of Prophet Muḥammad. |
| 570 | The Year of the Elephant - attempted storming of Makkah by Abrahah.
Birth of the Prophet. |
| 575 | Death of Āminah, mother of the Prophet. |
| 578 | Death of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the Prophet's grandfather. |
| 595 | The Prophet's marriage to Khadījah bint Khuwaylid. |
| 610 | The Bi'thah - beginning of the Revelation and the Prophet's mission. |
| 615 | The first hijrah to Abyssinia. |
| 616 | Second hijrah to Abyssinia led by Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib. |
| 621 | The First Pledge of 'Aqabah. |
| 622 | The Second Pledge of 'Aqabah. |
| 624/2 AH | The Prophet's Hijrah to Madinah
Expedition of 'Abdullāh ibn Jaḥsh to Nakhlah. |
| | Battle of Badr. |
| 625/3 | Revolt and expulsion of Banū Qaynuqā' |

- from Madinah.
 Battle of Uḥud (Shawwāl).
 625/4 Banishment of Banū an-Naḍīr from Madinah and their resettlement in Khaybar.
 Pre-emptive expedition of the Prophet to Najd - 'Abbād ibn Bishr included in expeditionary force.
 626/5 Expedition to Dumāt al-Jandal (Rabī' al-Awwal).
 627/5 Battle of al-Khandaq (the Trench) also called Battle of al-Aḥzāb (Shawwāl).
 628/6 Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah with Quraysh (Dhu-l Qa'dah).
 628/7 Marriage of the Prophet to Ramlah bint Abī Sufyān (Jumāda-l Ūla).
 Delegations of the Prophet to Persian and Byzantine Empires.
 Death of Khusraw Parvez, Persian (Sasanian) Emperor who reigned from 580 CE.
 629/8 Expedition to Mu'tah in which the three commanders - Zayd ibn al-Ḥārithah, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib and 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah - were killed.
 630/8 Liberation of Makkah (Ramaḍān).
 Battle of Ḥunayn (Shawwāl).
 630/9 Expedition to Tabūk.
 630/10 Farewell Pilgrimage of the Prophet.
 632/11 Death of the Prophet, may God bless and grant him peace (Rabī' al-Awwal).
 632-634/11-13 Caliphate of Abū Bakr.

- Riddah* wars against Musaylamah and others.
 634-644/13-24 Caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.
 635/14 Damascus taken, followed by some other Syrian cities.
 636/15 Battle of Yarmūk against Byzantines. Emperor Heraclius' brother is killed in battle.
 637/16 Battle of Qādisiyyah, near Ḥirah against Persian (Sasanian) army. Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon is taken.
 638/17 Jerusalem comes under Muslim control.
 641/22 Battle of Nihāwand in Central Persia in which remaining Sasanian army is defeated by Muslim forces under Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān.
 Babylon in Egypt (site of later Fustāt and Cairo) taken by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ.
 644-655/24-36 Caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.
 Growth of Muslim sea power.
 656-661/36-41 Caliphate of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.
 673/54 'Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr, generally recognised as Caliph, killed in Makkah.

COMPANIONS *of the* PROPHET

This book highlights aspects of the lives of thirty Companions of the Prophet, some famous, others almost completely unknown.

Here the trials and triumphs of the early Muslims as individuals are well-portrayed. Their various paths to Islam - sometimes direct, sometimes long and tortuous, their devotion to the noble Prophet, their endeavours in peace time and their exploits in war - all serve to cast them in a heroic mould.

This is the second of two (formerly published as a series of three) books based on original Arabic sources and written in a style that is lively and often gripping.

The lives of the Sahabah or Companions of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, is a rich storehouse of knowledge, guidance and inspiration. The men and women whose stories are told here helped to lay the foundations of a new world order, and it is only fitting that they should be more widely known.

